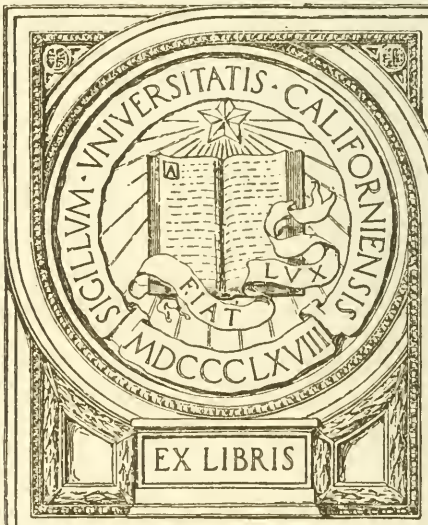
LIFE & TIMES of STEPHEN HIGGINSON

By

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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LIFE AND TIMES
OF
STEPHEN HIGGINSON

S. Higginson

LIFE AND TIMES
OF
STEPHEN HIGGINSON

Member of the Continental Congress (1783)
and
Author of the "Laco" Letters, relating to John Hancock (1789)

BY

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

DR. FRANKLIN used to lament, so far as he could be said to lament anything, the absence of habitual cheerfulness among the Federalists with whom his later life was cast. It is hard for us to tell how much of this charge was just and how much was based on the dignity assumed unconsciously by the Revolutionary leaders while creating a new nation, the destinies of which were really more momentous than they knew. The life of George Washington had been written four times — by the elder Bancroft, by Marshall, by Sparks, and by the vivacious Weems — before any biographer had acknowledged in print that this hero ever smiled ; and it was reserved for the cheery and benignant Irving to point out, though only in the small types of a

footnote, that Washington once laughed heartily. Again, among the minor leaders of that period, one of the first to have his life written was Gouverneur Morris, when Jared Sparks became his biographer, but it was not until Morris's own diaries and letters appeared in full, without Sparks's supervision, that they turned out to be almost as amusing as those of Horace Walpole. All this comes home to me when I undertake the memoir of my grandfather, Stephen Higginson.

It is a significant fact that while all his official writings, even in satire, have the predominant gravity which marks the rest of the Federalists, yet I learned from the only real specimen of the Federalist leaders with whom I remember to have conversed, — James Richardson of Rhode Island, — of my grandfather's uttering the only jocose word that I ever heard attributed to any Federalist in defeat. When the last large gathering of this body of men was

held at George Cabot's house in Brookline and a discussion arose as to how they should treat their conquerors, and when all others had advocated the sternest and most crushing contempt, the only one who took the matter philosophically was Stephen Higginson. "After all, gentlemen," he said, "if a man has to live in the house with a cat, he cannot always address her as 'cat'! Sometimes he must call her 'Pussy.'"

To have been one of the first American shipmasters called on to testify before Parliament as to American colonial matters; to have been a member of the Continental Congress in its closing days; to have been second in command during the first effective resistance to Shays' Rebellion; the first to argue from that peril the need of a stronger government; the first to suggest that the voices of nine out of the thirteen States could make the Confederacy into a Nation; the first to organize and equip the

American Navy under Jefferson's administration; — these afford sufficient ground to justify the writing of any man's memoir. These suffice to place Stephen Higginson where he belongs, among the recognized leaders of his time, that being the period of the very formation of the American Republic. The fact that he sharply criticised John Hancock, in the once famous "Laco" letters, shows him to have been, like most of the leaders of that period, a frank critic of his compeers, if somewhat more spicy than the rest; but the internal disputes among reformers are sometimes quite as interesting as the reforms themselves, and we need to know the limitations of our leaders by their judgments of one another.

II

THE OLD SALEM FAMILIES

"Those that love their owne chimney corner and dare not go farre beyond their own townes end shall never have the honour to see these wonderfull workes of Almighty God."— *Francis Higginson, on his voyage to America in 1629.*

THE OLD SALEM FAMILIES

ONE of the most important steps in human progress thus far taken by the American nation lies clearly in its establishment of a new standard of ancestry. For instance, the earliest distinctly known ancestress of the Higginson family, whether of the English or New English branch, was the widow Joane Higginson. It is nearly three and a half centuries since this English widow bequeathed, by her last will and testament, seven pounds a year to the poor of Berkeswell, County Warwick. A source more honorable for a family stock could hardly be demanded; the very smallness of the sum, tried by the standards of to-day, making her act simpler and more dignified. It is from her that is also descended the English line of the family, of which

Major-General Sir George Wentworth Higginson, K. C. B., of the Grenadier Guards, is the representative.

I wish to write a memoir of the widow Joane's descendant in the seventh generation, Stephen Higginson, my grandfather, a member of the Continental Congress, that body which preceded and at length established the American Union. The widow Joane was mother of the Rev. John Higginson, who was Vicar of Claybrooke, Leicester, England, for fifty-three years. She was grandmother of the Rev. Francis, the immigrant, who graduated, like his father, at Jesus College, Cambridge, England, and, like his father, preached at Claybrooke, but came to Salem in 1629, and was the first English clergyman ordained on American soil.

The Rev. Francis Higginson wrote in a journal of his voyage in 1629: "Those that love their owne chimney corner and dare not go farre beyond their own townes

THE WHITFIELD-HIGGINSON HOUSE, GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT

end shall never have the honour to see these wonderfull workes of Almighty God."[1] The voyage from whose narrative this is quoted began on April 25, 1629, and lasted six weeks. Francis Higginson died within a year after arrival and was followed in the ministry at Salem by his eldest son, the Rev. John Higginson, who had been bred to the ministry, but became a teacher in the grammar school at Hartford, and then chaplain at the fort at Saybrook, Connecticut, where he was assistant pastor to the Rev. Henry Whitfield, whose daughter he married, the wedding taking place in an old stone mansion still standing and now the oldest house within the original limits of the United States. His mother having lately died, he was about removing to London, in 1659, to settle her estate, when the vessel which

[1] *Life of Francis Higginson*, p. 47. A full narrative of this preacher's career may be found in my life of him in *Makers of America*. New York, Dodd, Mead & Co.

bore himself and family was driven by stress of weather into Salem harbor. There he was persuaded to remain and take charge of the church founded by his father, thirty years before. He was ordained in August, 1660, and remained in continuous service until December 9, 1708, winning for himself the title of "the Nestor of the New England clergy."

The eldest son of this saintly man was also named John(2), and was born at Guilford, Connecticut, in 1646; was educated a merchant, was lieutenant-colonel of the regiment in Salem, led expeditions against the Indians, and was a member of the Governor's Council. Another son, Nathaniel, also born in Guilford, graduated at Harvard in 1670, and went to England, and afterwards to the East Indies, where he was governor of the royal factory at Madras. Some fine old family pictures painted for him are now in my possession. A third John(3) was a registrar of probate

NATHANIEL HIGGINSON, GOVERNOR OF MADRAS (HIS WIFE, AND, ENTERING THE ROOM, HIS FUTURE SON-IN-LAW, STEPHEN AYNSWORTH)

in Salem. His son Stephen (4) was one of the leading merchants of Salem, took an active part in the establishment of the town, and was thus commemorated, after his death, by the "Boston News Letter:" —

SALEM, October 15th, 1761.

On Monday the 12th Instant died at *Newbury*, and this Day was decently interred here, *Stephen Higginson*, Esq; of this Town. He was in Commission for the Peace, and a Justice of the Court of Pleas for this County, and a Member of the Honorable House of Representatives. A Gentleman of a truly amiable Character, both in public and private Life; as he was a tender and instructive Father, a kind and loving Husband, a sincere and steady Friend, an accurate Merchant; and retained an unblemished Character, thro' the whole of his Trade and Business, which was extensive. A Person of strict Virtue and Religion, but free from shew and os-

tentation, which he always abhorred. As few Persons exceeded him in useful Knowledge and Capacity to serve the Public, so he was second to no Man in the Uprightness of his Intentions, the Sincerity of his Declarations and Integrity of his Actions. These Virtues being very conspicuous in him, rendered him a Gentleman of a rising Character, and his Death may be justly esteemed, not only a private but a public Loss.[1]

Stephen Higginson, Second (5), the subject of this work, had thus for his lineal ancestors on the father's side a line consisting of three clergymen, a member of the Governor's Council, a notary public, and a justice of the Court of Common Pleas. His mother was Elizabeth, daughter of John and Anna (Orne) Cabot, he being thus by maternal inheritance connected with one or two Salem families also prominent and

[1] *Boston News Letter*, October 22, 1761.

Boo: 1 Knowe: vnto all men by these p[re]sents that I John Higgynson sen[r]
of Salem in the County of Essex: for & in consideration of the sume of twenty
five pounes sterling to me in hand paid by Capt Thomas Savage of Boston
in the County of Suffolk marchant, before the ensealing & delivery of
these p[re]sents, I have Bargained & sould, & doe by these p[re]sents, Bargain
sell, Alienate, assigne, sett, over & confirm: vnto the said Capt Thomas
Savage & to his heires & assignes, a certaine parcell of land containing
six Acres, scituate, & lying upon the necke so called, adjoyning to Lynn
on the east of the towne of Salem, & given by the inhabitants of the
towne vnto me the said John Higginson, in guift of the Lord 1664. as my
the towne Record apparethe, & is bounded westerly & southerly with
the land, formerly mr Oscar Crafords: now the land of the said Capt
Thomas Savage, easterly, with the high way & northerly with the comon
land. I have & doe hould the said six acres of land aforesaid
to the towne ground, as aforesaid, as it is bounded, with all the
right, p[re]vilidge, profitt & appurtenances, thereto belonging, vnto
the said Thomas Savage & to his heires, executors, administrators &
assignes, to his & their owne proper vse for ever: And I the said John
Higginson doe for my selfe my heires executors & administrators, for
& in their Covenant & promise, doe with the said Capt Thomas Savage his
heires, executors, administrators & assignes by these p[re]sents, to warrant
acquit & defend the p[re]misses (according to the Townes ground aforesaid) &
every singuler the p[re]misses against all p[er]sons laying lawfull claime thereto: vnto the said
Capt Thomas Savage, his heires & assignes for ever, And further I the
said John Higginson doe for my wife, by these p[re]sents, freely & fully release & quitt all her right title & dow-
ry & interest of & into the p[re]misses or any part thereof, vnto the said Thomas
Savage, his heires & assignes, for ever, And in witness hereunto we
have put to our hands & seales this twenty fifth day of november
in the yeare of our Lord God, One thousand six hundred & seaventy
one:

John Higginson Senior

Signed sealed & deliuered
in the p[re]sence of vs
William Veren sen[r]
Nathaniel Higginson

y[e] mark or signe
of Sarah
Higginson

This was acknowledged to be the act & deed of the above said
John Higginson sen[r] & of Sarah Higginson the second day
of December 1671 before me
Samuell Symonds

Entered & recorded with the Records of Salem Lib. 11. Fol. 71. 72.

prolific who were repeatedly intermarried with the Higginsons ; as were also the Lees, Jacksons, and others. He was born on November 28, 1743, went to the Salem schools, and was then brought up as a merchant in the counting-room of Deacon Smith of Boston. It seems quite probable that he may, like his cousin, George Cabot, have made a voyage or two as cabin-boy, in accordance with a custom then prevailing in the mercantile households of Salem. This seems probable in view of the fact that on his marrying, at twenty-one (in 1764), Susan, daughter of Aaron and Susanna (Porter) Cleveland, a second cousin of his, residing in Connecticut, he at once became a supercargo and then a navigator, voyaging to England, Spain, and elsewhere, as part owner. It is known that his family disapproved of this marriage, either on the ground of relationship or of his youth, and this may be the reason why the rash young couple went to Portsmouth,

New Hampshire, to be wedded, where they received from Governor Wentworth a marriage certificate peculiar enough to be quoted entire, as follows :—

By His Excellency Benning Wentworth Esq, Captain General Governor & Commander in Cheif in & over His Majesty's Province of New Hampshire

To Either of the Ordain'd Ministers of the Gospel of said Province Except one Drowne

You are hereby Authorized and Impower'd to join together in Holy Matrimony

STEPHEN HIGGINSON &
SUSANNA CLEVELANDE

Unless some Lawfull Impediment appears to you to the Contrary

Given at Portsmouth the 20th day of Octobere 1764

B WENTWORTH

Rece'd 13/6 Sterling for the above Liscence

S Atkinson Jun Secy

By His Excellency Benning Wentworth Esq. Captain General Governor &
Commander in Chief in & over His Majesty's Province of New Hampshire
&c &c &c

To either of the Ordained Ministers of the Gospel of any Denomination Protestant

You are hereby Authorized and Empowered to join together in Holy
Matrimony Asaphan Higginson &
Susanna Cleveland
Unless some lawfull Impediment appear to you to the Contrary

Given at Portsmouth the 20th day of October 1760

B Wentworth

Recd 13/6 Nothing for the above License

Wentworth Gov &c &c

Mr. Drowne, the subject of this stern exclusion, was one of the sect called by its members Independent Congregationalists, but by its opponents, who apparently included Governor Wentworth, "New Lights."

III

A SEA-CAPTAIN BEFORE PARLIAMENT (1775)

"From Salem, in Massachusetts Bay; a Merchant."—*Stephen Higginson, questioned by Edmund Burke, before a Committee of Parliament in 1771.*

A SEA-CAPTAIN BEFORE PARLIAMENT

The newly married youth established his household in Salem, in a modest dwelling at the corner of Main and Central streets, nearly opposite the Lafayette Coffee House, and soon set sail on his first voyage to England. He introduced himself to Mr. and Mrs. Cabot, of London, kinsmen of his, who were already established there, and made various acquaintances through his father's commercial correspondents. This led ultimately to his being called before a committee of the House of Commons in 1771, where he was in part questioned by Edmund Burke, in company with "Billy" Rotch, and apparently with the first Josiah Quincy. On his return to this country, he was vehemently attacked at Marblehead,

and even brought before court on charge of traitorous conduct, but had fortunately kept a copy of his precise answers, and won much applause when he produced them. They are preserved in Force's "Archives," and are well worth reprinting here also, as giving a good exhibition, almost unique, of the mercantile conditions prevailing at the time. They throw a curious light, for instance, on the jealousies existing thus early between New England and Nova Scotia on the presence, at that early time, of considerable numbers of Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch at Marblehead. They also throw light on the French fisheries already existing in Newfoundland, and on the whale fishery at Nantucket.

Report of testimony given before Parliament by Stephen Higginson, a Salem, Mass., Shipmaster.

Q. Of what country is he?

A. From *Salem*, in the *Massachusetts Bay;* a Merchant.

Q. Whether there is as much Corn and other Provisions produced in that Province as will supply the inhabitants?

A. Apprehend not.

Q. Whether there is sufficient Corn and other Provisions produced in all the *New England* Provinces for their support?

A. No.

Q. From whence do they receive additional support?

A. From the *Carolinas*, *Virginia*, *Maryland*, and *New-York*, chiefly.

Q. Whether he is acquainted with the trade of the Fisheries carried on in *New England?*

A. Not much acquainted with the Whale Fishery, but have considerable knowledge of the Cod Fishery.

Q. How many Vessels are employed in the Cod Fishery?

A. About seven hundred Vessels.

Q. Of what burthen are they?

A. Five hundred of them estimated from forty to seventy tons; the other two hundred from about fifteen to forty.

Q. How many hands do seven hundred Vessels carry?

A. On an average they carry about six.

Q. How many hands are employed on shore for the Cod Fishery?

A. About half the number are employed in curing the Fish that there is in taking of them.

Q. How many Vessels employed in carrying the Fishery to market?

A. Should imagine about three hundred and fifty, from seventy or eighty tons, to about one hundred and seventy or one hundred and eighty; they carry about eight hands, one with another.

Q. What would these people do if the Fishery was stopped?

A. I can't readily resolve that question; suppose they would remain where they

are as long as they could subsist, in hopes of being engaged in their old employment.

Q. But when that hope failed, and they could no longer subsist?

A. Then they will probably go elsewhere.

Q. Whether they would settle at *Halifax?*

A. In general, I think not.

Q. Why?

A. Several reasons; one is, the Fishermen in *Salem* and other Towns are a very quiet and steady set of men. They esteem the people of *Halifax* to be dissolute, and of a quite contrary turn. I think, therefore, they would not sit down among a people so different in their manners. Another reason is, that they think the Government of *Halifax* is arbitrary, and have a terrible notion of it. Another; those who have been there, have disliked the country very much, as being inhospit-

able, and affording but a very hard and coarse fare.

Q. Would they go to *Miguelon* and *St. Pierre*, and fish for *France?*

A. Don't think they would generally; from *Marblehead* some perhaps would.

Q. Why would they from thence?

A. Because the people there are of various nations, *Spaniards*, *Portuguese* and *Dutch;* but the others are born in the Towns where they live, have tenements and freeholds there, and would not leave their place of abode, I conceive.

Q. From whence do the Manufactures used in *New England* come?

A. I suppose from *Great Britain.*

Q. How do they pay for them?

A. By the proceeds of the Whale and Cod Fisheries chiefly.

Q. Do they receive Molasses in return for Fish?

A. A great quantity.

Q. What do they do with it?

A. It is chiefly manufactured into Rum; part is consumed in *America*, and part exported.

Q. Are the Merchants of *Massachusetts Bay* in debt to *Great Britain?*

A. Certainly.

Q. If the Fishery is stopped, what other means of paying their debts?

A. I know of no means but the articles of Pot and Pearl Ash, Lumber, Furs, Ships, and Flaxseed.

Q. What would that be in comparison to the debts?

A. Very small.

Q. Whether, supposing the Fishery stopped in *New England*, and allowed in *Nova Scotia*, they would not follow the Fishery in *Nova Scotia?*

A. I don't think they would.

Q. Whether there is not a constant export of Provisions from *New England* to the *West Indies?*

A. There is from *Connecticut* and the

Massachusetts; they export Cattle and other live stock.

Q. Whether *Indian* Corn is not exported to the *West Indies?*

A. Don't know that there is any.

Q. Is not Provisions carried to *Newfoundland?*

A. They supply the *Newfoundland* Fishery considerably, with Rice, Bread and Flour.

Q. Why the *Spaniards* and *Portuguese*, of *Marblehead*, would be more afraid of going to *Halifax*, than to *Miguelon* and *St. Pierre?*

A. I don't know that they would.

Q. If they send their Fish to *Spanish* markets this year, would they not bring back the proceeds to *America*, and not to *Great Britain?*

A. I imagine the proceeds of the Fish would centre here this year as usual.

Withdrew.

Called in again.

Q. Whether the *Indian Corn* and Flour exported from the Bay for the *Newfoundland* Fishery, is not imported from *Carolina, Pennsylvania, and New York?*

A. It is. The Bread and Corn exported to *Newfoundland* Fishery, is not one eighth part of the Corn and Flour imported from the Southern Colonies.

Q. Is not part of the Exports to *Spain* the manufacture of *New England?*

A. No.

Q. Does he know whether the Debt due to the Merchants of *Great Britain* is regularly paid or not?

A. They have been paid with less punctuality for the four or five years last past than before.

Q. To what do you attribute that?

A. To their having imported, in the years 1770, 1771, and 1772, more Goods than was sufficient for their market.

Q. Do the merchants of *England* still continue to trust the *Americans?*

A. I know of no instance of their having refused to give them credit.

Q. Whether this Bill will enable the Merchants to pay their debts better?

A. Certainly not. The alteration will be quite the reverse, and will cut off the source of payment.

Q. Does he understand the state of the *French* Fishery on *Newfoundland?*

A. Not particularly; but have learn't from our Fishermen that they have of late increased it.

Q. If the Fishery from *New England* was stopped, would not the *French* have a part of it?

A. Suppose they might.

Q. Is he acquainted with the method of the *French* Fishery?

A. Yes.

Q. Do the *French* fish for themselves, or buy it of the *New England* Fishermen?

A. I never heard of their buying any.

Q. Can the *French* cure the Fish as well as *New England* men?

A. I don't imagine they can; for the same reason that the *Newfoundland* Fish is not so well cured, the climate being more subject to fogs.

Q. Whether, if the Provinces are restrained from fishing, their nets would not rot, and materials become unserviceable?

A. They certainly would very soon.

Q. Whether, if this Bill takes place, the Provinces would be in distress for want of Provisions?

A. I imagine they will.

Q. Whether the people of *Nantucket* who follow the Whale Fishery, will not be ruined by its being stopped?

A. They must be entirely ruined.

Q. Could the people of *Great Britain* cure the Fish as well as the *New England* men?

A. They may as dry, but the quality of the fish will be inferiour.

Q. Is there not a Coast Fishery for the supply of fresh Fish?

A. A vast deal. In the sea-ports of *Massachusetts Bay*, quarter of the people live on fresh Fish.

Q. Does it extend to the four Provinces?

A. Not in the same degree.

Q. What would become of those articles, Potash &c., if not exported?

A. I suppose the manufacture of Pot and Pearl-ash would cease till the trade opened again.

Q. Whether the Non-Exportation Agreement would not affect the Merchants here, as much as the Bill?

A. I believe not; those articles being not above three twentieths of the whole.

Q. Does he know any thing of the sale of the Fish in the *Spanish* Ports, and of the consumption inland?

A. Yes.

Q. Whether the *New England* Fish

is sent as far inland as the *Newfoundland* Fish?

A. The early spring Fish from *New England* is sent further, it being much tougher, and for this quality a much greater price is given than for the *Newfoundland* Fish.

Q. Do you know this to be fact?

A. I do.

Q. Whether Fish cured in *Newfoundland* is carried to *Portugal*, and thence to the *Brazils?*

A. Can't say.

Q. Whether the Non-Importation Agreement will not prevent their sending Fish to the *West India* Islands?

A. Apprehend not.

Withdrew.[1]

[1] Force's *Archives*, Fourth Series, i, pp. 1645–48 (compare Felt's *Annals of Salem*, ii (ed. 1849), 553).

IV

THE QUARTER-DECK IN POLITICS (1783)

"Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind."

Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron.

THE QUARTER-DECK IN POLITICS

I HAVE been disappointed to find among the well-preserved documents of the Essex Institute at Salem so little about the details of Salem commerce before the Revolution, this proceeding from the fact that the records of the custom-house were generally removed at this last period. The only authentic record which I have obtained is that in 1772 "Capt. Stephen Higginson brought home a bell of about 900 lbs. for the North church and another of 590 lbs. for the East church. The latter sold their old bell of 217½ lbs. to Harvard College at ⅙ lb. and it was transported thither."[1] It is perhaps amusingly suggestive of the clerical traditions of the family at that early day that this

[1] Felt's *Annals of Salem*, i (ed. 1845), 387.

105277

only definitely recorded service should be for the churches, and in a subsidiary way that he should have ultimately rendered service to Harvard College, with which institution the pursuits and fortunes of his descendants have been so closely intertwined. What is certain is that these voyages continued more or less regularly up to the time of the American Revolution, and were generally followed by privateering under the same or different officers during that whole period. Thus Stephen Higginson's only brother, Henry (born December 14, 1747, and died unmarried), commanded privateers in 1782, namely, the brig Joseph, carrying eight guns and fifteen men, and the brig Swallow, with six guns and twenty men.[1]

[1] See Captain Preble's "Notes on Early Ship-Building in Massachusetts," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (January, 1872, pp. 21, 27). Henry Higginson was one of eighty-one volunteers from Salem for the Rhode Island expedition. They reached Rhode Island August 16, 1778, fought and retreated, finding themselves unsupported by the

QUARTER-DECK IN POLITICS

The War of the Revolution once over, the Salem merchants sought for wider and wider adventure. Joseph Peabody lived to own, first and last, eighty-three ships, which he freighted himself; he shipped about seven thousand seamen, and promoted forty-five men to be captains who had first shipped with him as boys. Other merchants, of whom Elias Hasket Derby was the chief, were constantly projecting distant voyages, and taking pains to bring forward enterprising young men, who were given ventures of their own as captain or supercargo. These were often the sons of shipowners, and, aided by the excellent public schools of Salem, became officers at an age that seems surprisingly early. Nathaniel Silsbee, the eldest son of a sea-captain, went to sea as captain's clerk at fourteen; his brother William did the

French fleet (*Essex Institute Collections*, i, 113). Henry Higginson was also deputy in the Massachusetts Legislature (Felt's *Annals of Salem*, ii (ed. 1849), 565).

same at fifteen, and his brother Zachariah at sixteen. The eldest brother was in command of a vessel for a nineteen-months voyage before he was nineteen, and the two others before they were twenty. All three retired from the sea when under twenty-nine. Captain Nathaniel Silsbee had sailed one East-India voyage of nineteen months, at the beginning of which neither he nor his first mate (Charles Derby) nor his second mate (Richard Cleveland) was twenty years old. Stephen Higginson commanded one of his father's ships at twenty-one. His double-first cousin, George Cabot, — afterward the first Secretary of the Navy, and the president of the Hartford Convention, — left Harvard College and went to sea at sixteen as cabin-boy under his brother-in-law, Joseph Lee ; the traditional opinion expressed in the family being that "Cap'n Joe would put George Cabot's nose to the grindstone," which was doubt-

Account of Sales of 36 hhds. brown Sugars and 4 Chists Bohea Tea on acct. of Elias Hasket Derby Esqr.

86		@ cwt. qrs. lbs.					
7	20 hhds. Sugar Cont.	206	3	23	@ 40/	£ 573	18 3
	9 hhds. ditto	129	1	4	@ 42/	271	9 11
	6 hhds. ditto	83	3	6	@ 39/	163	8 ..
	1 hhd. ditto	11	0	20	@ 45/	31	17 11
	4 Chists Bohea Tea	1423 lbs.			@ 1/11	136	7 5
						£ 1177	1 6
	Storage				£ 3 . 0 . 0		
	weighg.				3		
	wastage				9		
	Trucking to scale				1		
	our Commissions a 2/2/16				29 . 8 . 6	38	8 6
					Errs Excepted £	1138	13 ..

Errors Excepted

Boston Jany. 30th 1786 Higginson & Weld

less done. At twenty, Cabot was himself a captain. In the slower developments of the present day, there is something amusing in this carnival of youth.

A type of character so strong as that of the old Salem sea-captains could not well pass away in America without making its final mark on the politics as well as the business of the nation. In the fierce strife between the Federalists and the Democrats, these men not only took the Federalist side as a body, but for a time they gave a name to it. Salem was Federalist and the headquarters of Federalism was Salem. The strength of that strong party was in the merchants of Essex County, most of whom had been shipmasters in their youth. The name familiarly given to the party was "Essex Junto." Timothy Pickering wrote in a letter in 1808[1] that the first time he heard this phrase was

[1] Henry Adams's *Documents Relating to New England Federalism* (Boston, 1877), p. 369.

from President John Adams as late as 1797, and that the three men whom he named as heading the clique were George Cabot, Stephen Higginson, and Theophilus Parsons ; in other words, two ex-sea-captains and the chief maritime lawyer of his time.

The habit of the quarter-deck, in fact, went all through the Federalist party of Massachusetts. The slaveholders themselves did not more firmly believe that they constituted the nation. To the "Essex Junto," Jefferson himself seemed but a mutineering first mate, and his "rights of man" but the black flag of a rebellious crew. They paid the penalty of their own autocratic habits ; they lived to see their cause lost ; but they went down with their flags flying, having had the satisfaction — if satisfaction it was — to see much of their cargo of political principles transferred bodily to the hold of their victor.

In the early part of the Revolutionary

War, Stephen Higginson turned his energies, like most Salem sea-captains and shipowners, to privateering; he was credited with having made by this pursuit the sum of $70,000, or at least this was the opinion of his nephew and friend, John Lowell. In 1778 he removed from Salem to Boston, and became the partner of his kinsman, Jonathan Jackson, was a member of the Massachusetts Legislature in 1782, and was elected thence to the Colonial Congress on October 2, 1782. During all this intermediate period I can find no letters from him, either at the Salem Athenæum or among those published by Mr. Jameson,[1] which go back earlier than 1783; and have none in my own possession save the two following, which, though wholly commercial, are illustrative of the period. Both are addressed to his brother-in-law, Stephen Cleveland, then in command or on board of the brig Despatch, at Bor-

[1] American Historical Ass'n's *Report* for 1896, i, 704–841.

deaux, buying arms and munitions of war for the Continental Army. At the time when these letters were written, their author was thirty-five years of age.

BILBOA, Nov. 22, 1776.

DE STEPH —

I have been waiting here 10 days for aBan[1] to sail, which has given me an opp'y of hearing of your arrival at Bourdeaux — Wish you had wrote me a Line when my Letters by you was forwarded to me — have not heard one word from Lucy since I left home — I am not very well at present & should my Vessel sail before I feel better I may perhaps stay behind — pray write me immediately, let me know what sort of a Vessel you have when you will probably sail &c, perhaps I may go home with you — your Friend &c

S. HIGGINSON.

[1] From MS. I have tried in vain to discover from old seafaring men what this phrase "aBan" or "a Ban" signifies.

Bilboa Nov. 22. 1776

Dr. Steph

I have been waiting here 10 days for a Vessel to sail, which has given me an opp.ty of hearing of your arrival at Bordeaux — With you had wrote me a line when my Letters by your wife forwarded to me — have not heard one word from any since I left home — I am not very well at present should my Vessel sail before I feel better I may perhaps stay behind — pray write me immediately, let me know what sort of a Vessel you have when you will probably sail &c. perhaps I may go home with you — your Friend &c.

S. Higginson

Bilboa, Novr 26. 1776.

Dr Steph.

I this moment recd. yours & Harry's from Bordeaux — Am very glad to hear that Susy & all our friends are well. Wish you had accepted Mr Hooper's offer instead of this, altho' you are now on a good lay — yet the other would be more permanent & is one of the best employs I know of. Had I recd yours at the time I recd those you brought for me from home, should have stayed and gone home with you, for I am now very unwell, tho' better than I have been, but am just now going down to Portogalette, where the vessel has been ten days wayting a Ban & the pilot says we shall certainly sail at 4 in the morning

George Cabot sailed four weeks ago with St Barb, at the time John Lee & Fletcher sailed — Birchmore also sails in his Brigt in Co with us — with him go John Cabot, Babson, Rappel & Tittle of M'head — We

have this day certain advice that there is a Frigate cruising off Cape Pinas and another off Ortegal — hope We shall avoid them — Candles will sell here at 9 to 10 rials P M, Holland offers the best market for them, I am now shipping 200 Boxes to Mr. John Hodshon at Amsterdam, that Collyer brought out — If Harry is not gone, give my love to him & tell him I recd Birmingham's balance and have laid it out in Hank'fs, but can do nothing with John Cabot, as he is below on board the vessel & will sail in the morning — Am glad Harry has got the vessel, hope you will both get home safe — My respects to Messs French & Co. have not time to write them now & to Mes. Poncett & Maynard if you know them.

Your friend & humb. Servant

S. Higginson

P. S. Pot ashes are not used here I believe, & therefore no market for it.[1]

[1] From MSS.

V

THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS (1783)

"The Congress [of Vienna] does not walk, but it dances."
— *Prince de Ligne.*

THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

STEPHEN HIGGINSON'S near kinsman and lifelong friend, John Lowell, says of him that he was as much out of office throughout life as so able a man could be. There was indeed one anecdote of his having gone hastily on board one of his own vessels, and having put out to sea, in order to get rid of persuasion to accept a nomination. His partner, Jonathan Jackson, had, however, been a member of Congress about the year 1782; while Stephen Higginson had been a member of the State Legislature from Boston in 1782, and an election to Congress had followed after. He was chosen on October 24, 1782, to serve for one year from the first Monday in November, though he did not actually take his seat until February 27, 1783. It was a common thing among the delegates

to arrange among themselves the periods of their attendance.[1]

The historian Hildreth says of the Continental Congress: "History knows few bodies so remarkable. The Long Parliament of Charles I, the French National Assembly, are alone to be compared with it."[2] Yet its inadequacy came gradually to be so marked, as time went on, from its lack of established legal authority, that the average attendance amounted in 1783 to only twenty persons. Even under these conditions it is curious to observe how precisely the relative positions of Massachusetts and South Carolina, on the subject of slavery, were the same as now. In the Continental Congress, — or "old Congress," as it was long called, — when on the first of April, 1783, it was agreed to count only three fifths of the slaves as a basis for taxation, Massachusetts could

[1] Austin's *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, i, 411.

[2] Hildreth's *History of the United States*, iii, 547.

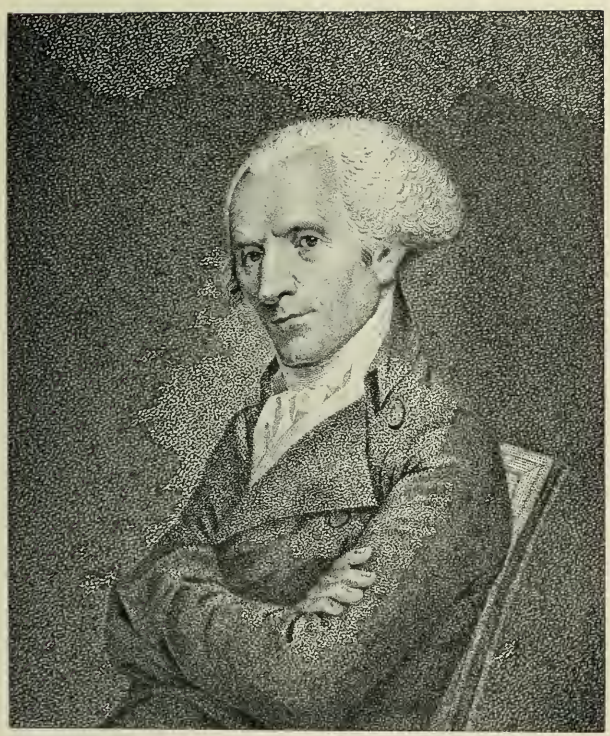
not be brought to sanction the arrangement. Her delegation was divided — Messrs. Osgood and Gorham voting "aye" and Messrs. Holten and Higginson voting "no." Rhode Island voted "no" and so did one of the four members of Virginia. Georgia was not present. All the other states and delegates voted "aye."[1]

The last year of the Continental Congress was in fact a period of transition and all signs predicted the transfer of power to some organization that should be more sufficient unto itself. The States, not yet having parted with their independent sovereignty, claimed more immediate authority than is now claimed by them; as, for instance, when they not merely criticised the action of their delegates but demanded in some cases a fortnightly report of their proceedings. In other words, they re-

[1] Journal of Congress, viii, 171, 172; Upham's Speech (Mass. Legislature), February 20, 1849, p. 15; Curtis's *History of the Constitution*, i, 213 note.

garded their delegates in the light of ministers representing wholly independent sovereignties. In Stephen Higginson's time, this complication was enhanced by the rather touchy and imperious temperament of Elbridge Gerry, leader of his delegation. One of Stephen Higginson's first acts in Congress was to sign a protest with his colleagues, Holten and Gorham, in their capacity as delegates in Congress from the State of Massachusetts, against the denial to their colleague, Mr. Gerry, of his right of calling for the ayes and nays, — a question of order which had led to Gerry's resignation [1] of his seat and had kept him away from Congress for nearly three years. Again, a committee of correspondence had been appointed in Massachusetts, to which committee Mr. Gerry had addressed a letter in behalf of the delegates, explaining the injustice to Massachusetts in the appointment of a

[1] Austin's *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, i, 324.



ELBRIDGE GERRY

sinking fund to redeem bills of credit.[1] This letter was never communicated to the Legislature, a fact of which Stephen Higginson writes to Mr. Gerry: "The suppression of our letter has produced a great fermentation. It has much hurt our friend Mr. S. Adams, and has ruined Mr. Appleton's public course," Mr. Appleton having claimed to have put it in his pocket and forgotten it. This was voted unsatisfactory and he was not reëlected. "I thought it very imprudent and unfair in them," Higginson continues, "and told them so; but they were afraid it would hurt their darling child, the Continental Impost Bill. Many of the members say, that had it not been suppressed the act would not have passed."[2] Mr. Adams alleged as his excuse the pressure of business upon him as President of the Senate, and the recent exami-

[1] Austin's *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, i, 412–414; Staples's *Rhode Island*, 489.

[2] Austin's *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, i, 414.

nation of Mr. Higginson which he thought had superseded the necessity of any farther information. It seems that Mr. Higginson had just been personally examined before the State Legislature, this being another instance of that close supervision exercised by the States over the Continental Congress.

It appears from the Journal of Congress that on May 7, 1783, a committee consisting of Mr. Higginson, Mr. Clarke, and Mr. Gervais, to whom was referred a motion of Mr. Dyer, reported: —

"That such of the States as have settled with the officers and soldiers of their respective lines, for their pay in the Army of the United States since the first day of August, 1780, be requested to exhibit the accounts of such payments, with proper vouchers, shewing the periods to which they have settled with their several lines and the manner in which such payments were made, and the superintendant of

finance is hereby directed, upon the receipt of such accounts, vouched as aforesaid, to give to such States public securities, payable in the same manner and for the same sums as would have been otherwise given to the officers and soldiers of such lines for their pay, from the said first day of August, 1780, to the time when they were so paid by their respective States."[1]

All New England members voted "aye" on this resolution, but Southern members generally "no," and the question was lost.

The following records also appear: August 11, 1783, there were reports by a committee, including Mr. Higginson, against a petition from John Irwin in regard to balance of pay. August 12, 1783, a committee, consisting of Mr. Higginson, Mr. Clarke, and Mr. Read, reported recommending a vote of thanks to the inhabitants of New Brunswick [N. J.].

[1] *Journal of Congress*, viii, 257.

August 13, 1783, Mr. Higginson voted against postponement of a motion of Mr. Howell that Congress should be adjourned to meet at Philadelphia on the 21st (that is, leaving Princeton).[1]

August 19, 1783, he voted "aye" on report on finance. August 26, 1783, Washington visited the Congress.

August 27, 1783, Mr. Higginson voted "aye" on a motion of Mr. Ellery as to a peace establishment. His associate, Mr. Holten, voted "no," they being thus divided, which was rare. He voted on several questions of routine up to September 10, 1783. Later than this he several times moved or seconded successful resolutions to strike out passages from reports, etc.

On September 13, 1783, he voted against postponing certain resolutions, and the same on September 16, 18, 19, and 20.[2]

In the separate publication called "Secret

[1] *Journal of Congress*, viii, 326–338.

[2] *Ibid.*, 332, 333, 336, 354.

Journal" of Congress there appear the following references to the participation of Stephen Higginson in the Continental Congress.

On April 11, 1783, he voted to approve the proclamation for cessation of arms in the seventh year of sovereignty and independence. On May 5, 1783, he voted against the erasure of a resolution asking additional loan from France. (Resolution defeated.) On May 21, 1783, he voted "no" on a resolution expressing unwillingness to become a party to a new confederacy with Russia. (Clause struck out. Voted in a minority on two subsequent votes.) On May 22, 1783, his vote appears several times in respect to instructions to Mr. Dana, after which, on motion of Mr. Higginson, it was ordered that a committee be appointed to prepare and report a plan of a commercial treaty, proper to be transmitted to Mr. Dana. The members chosen were Mr. Fitzsimmons, Mr. Higginson,

and Mr. Rutledge. September 25, 1783, a committee consisting of Mr. Madison, Mr. Higginson, and Mr. Hamilton, to whom was referred a letter from Dr. Franklin of the 15th of April last, reported the draft of a proclamation, which was agreed to, announcing treaty with Sweden (this in Congress at Princeton).[1]

On September 26 and 29, 1783, his name appears on several important committees, as, for instance, under date of September 29, 1783. The committee consisting of Messrs. Duane, Rutledge, Fitzsimmons, Gerry, and Higginson, appointed to consider the late dispatches from the ministers of the United States at foreign courts, and to determine what means are necessary to be taken thereon, reported upon six points, all of which were sustained.[2]

His name, however, does not appear in

[1] The full text of this treaty appears in *Journal of Congress*, viii, 385.

[2] *Secret Journal of Congress*, iii, 323, 342, 344, 354, 394, 395, 397.

the voting list after May 22, 1783, but it appears occasionally in connection with reports prepared at the homes of the respective members. Among these reports the two following, kindly furnished me by Worthington C. Ford, Esq., Chief of Division of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress, are hitherto unpublished and of some importance: —

"Report of Mr. Higginson, Mr. A. Lee, Mr. S. Huntington. On Motion respecting Secy for foreign affairs, office. Delivered August 26, 1783. Read. Entd — March 2, 1784 Mr. Remson elected under Secty to take charge of papers."

"The Committee to whom were committed the motions of Mr. Duane, and of Mr. S. Huntington relative to the Office for foreign Affairs are of Opinion that it is of the highest importance that a Secretary for that Office should be elected, and that in the mean time that papers be-

longing thereto should be so disposed of as that Congress may have recourse to them when occasion shall require it — the following Resolutions are submitted —

"That the order of the Day for electing a Secretary for foreign Affairs be called for on Thursday next.

"That a Committee be appointed forthwith, to take a list of the papers belonging to the Office for foreign Affairs and to deliver them when listed to the Secretary of Congress, who shall arrange and take care of them untill a Secretary for foreign Affairs shall be elected and ready to enter upon the Business of that Office." [1]

"Report of Mr. Higginson, Mr. Izard, Mr. B. Huntington on letter of Mr. H. Laurens of 17 June, and Mr. Carmichael of 13 March, 1783. Delivered Sept. 1. Entered — read. This is superceded by the instructions passed Oct. 29 1783."

From the *MS. Papers* of the Continental Congress, no 25, vol. ii, folio 247.

"The Committee to whom were committed the Letters from Mr. Lawrence [Laurens] and Mr. Carmichael &c &c, submit the following resolutions.

"That Commissions be forthwith prepared and forwarded to John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay and Henry Lawrence Esqrs authorising them or any two or more of them to negotiate a Treaty of Amity & Commerce with the Court of great Britain upon terms of the most perfect re[ci]procity and so as to render the Trade of these united States with Britain and her Dominions beneficial and respectable — the Commercial regulations in said Treaty to be made as near as possible in conformity to the liberal principles contained in the Articles proposed by the ministers of the united States to Mr. Hartley on the 29th day of April last — the Treaty to continue for the Term of fifteen years and to be subject to the revision of Congress previous to its being ratified.

And that they have liberty to extend the duration of such commercial regulations as may have been formed with Britain to a period sufficiently distant for revising and ratifying the said Treaty; or to agree upon new Regulations for that purpose as they shall judge most expedient.

"That the said Commissioners or any one or more of them be authorised to negotiate with the Emperor of Morocco and such other States on the Coast of Barbary as may be necessary, for procuring Passports for the Vessels of the united States, and to apply if they think it expedient to such of the Powers in Europe as are in Amity with the united States for their assistance in such negociations.

"The Committee are of opinion that Treaties of Amity and Commerce should be formed with the Court of Portugal, the Emperor of Germany, the King of Naples and Sicily, and with the Grand Duke of

Tuscany as soon as circumstances will permit.

"They are also of Opinion that Mr. William McCormick should be informed that Congress can give him no decisive Answer upon the Subject of his memorial, and that if he is desirous of establishing himself in his Business in any part of the united States he must apply to the Government of that particular State in which he wishes to reside." [1]

[1] From the *MS. Papers* of the Continental Congress, no. 19, vol. iii, folio 447.

VI

THE ANNAPOLIS CONVENTION (SEPTEMBER, 1786)

"A meeting of gentle lights without a name."—*Sir John Suckling.*

THE ANNAPOLIS CONVENTION

THE following letter from Stephen Higginson to John Adams has an especial interest as referring to the once celebrated Annapolis Convention (September 11, 1786), which was, though seemingly abortive, and now almost forgotten, a distinct step in the momentous transition from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution of the United States.

It will be seen by this letter that Stephen Higginson was one of the proposed delegates from Massachusetts to Annapolis, not one of whom, however, actually attended; and this for some reason not now quite clear. The same was true of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and North Carolina, all of which States had gone

through the form of appointing delegates. Five States only were present through commissioners, these being Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. The fact that the numbers were so few, the powers of several delegations so limited, and the aspects of things so alarming,— since Shays' Rebellion was just impending,— these facts apparently caused the convention to adjourn after recommending the adoption of a plan, drawn up by Hamilton, that a convention of all the States be called for the purpose of rendering "the Constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union."

This may seem an unimportant step, yet it led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which gave the nation its present mode of government. It will be seen that the letter gives us the point of view of Stephen Higginson.

THE ANNAPOLIS CONVENTION

TO JOHN ADAMS[1]

Boston, July, 1786.

Sir:

Your obliging letter of 18 Feby — I duly received. to me it is extraordinary, that having a common Interest in a commercial View, and a Rival in France equally dangerous to both, no Arrangements can be made between us and the British for our mutual safety and advantage. it is not uncommon for Individuals to sacrifice their Interest to gratify their resentment; but it does not often happen that States, especially such as have had long experience in the School of politics, are so much led away by resentful feelings, it must surely be much against their national Interest and Character, for the British to suffer the most important national advantages to be transferred from themselves to the French, when possessed

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 733.

of the means of preventing it with the greatest Ease. — It is very unfortunate for this State, that the narrow policy of Britain so much affects our two Fisheries, which are our principal support. take these Staples from us, and the Commerce of Massachusetts will sink to almost nothing. there is no State in the Union which suffers in any degree equal to this from the restrictions of Britain; these sufferings may however eventually produce great Good, by checking habits of luxury and dissipation, and teaching us the necessity of cultivating those of an opposite nature — we shall learn by experience that to be independent and happy, we must be industrious and frugal. — The Act for regulating the Trade of foreigners in our ports, which passed the last year, was adopted with great Coolness and met with much Opposition from Country Gentlemen. And finding that the States have not generally adopted similar restric-

tions, and that Rhode-Island and Hampshire [1] have repealed their Acts of Navigation, our Court have this Session suspended ours.[2] I have ever approved of the general principle of that Act, and wished that the Object of it might be attained; but convinced that many of the States would not be disposed to make a general restraining System and persuaded that partial restrictions could not produce the desired effect upon the Conduct of Britain, I at first doubted the propriety of the measure. But as no great Evil can result from its continuance till the Fall, to prevent the appearance of versatility, to keep up by our example the attention of the States to the Subject, and to enjoy the credit of having taken the lead, in case the commercial Convention which is to be

[1] By act of February, 1786, the Rhode Island navigation act was suspended until Connecticut should pass one.

[2] By act of July 5, 1786, Massachusetts suspended her navigation act till the other States should pass similar statutes.

held in September[1] should recommend its being made a general System, I should not have gone so far as to suspend it.—

The ostensible object of that Convention is the regulation of Commerce; but when I consider the men who are deputed from New-York, Pennsylvania and Virginia, and the source from whence the proposition was made, I am strongly inclined to think political Objects are intended to be combined with commercial, if they do not principally engross their Attention. there will be from New-Yorke Mr. Duane, Mr Hamilton, Mr Chancellor Livingstone. from Pennsylvania Mr. Robert Morris, Mr Fitzsimmons, Mr George Clymer from Virginia Mr Randolph, Mr. Madison, Judge Jones, and several others from those States of like political principles and characters. the Measure appears to have originated in Virginia and with Mr Maddison. the Men

[1] The Annapolis Convention (1786); Higginson was chosen as a delegate, but declined to attend.

I have mentioned are all of them esteemed great Aristocrats, and their Constituents know that such is their Character — few of them have been in the commercial line, nor is it probable they know or care much about commercial Objects. —

As this State from the nature and variety of its Trade, is more likely to be affected by general commercial Arrangements, than any other of the States, some persons have been appointed to represent it in the proposed Convention; they are Mr Lowell, Mr Dana, Mr Gerry, Mr Theo: Parsons, Mr. George Cabot, Mr Sullivan and myself. If it be practicable to effect a general regulation of Trade, and to harmonise the apparently variant Interests of the States, it will probably be done by the Convention. — I shall be very happy to have it effected, as we may then make an impression upon the British favorable to our Views; but this I rather hope than expect. — If the British are not blind to

their own Interests, or unduly wedded to their own Opinions, they will seriously view the Arrangements of France, to supply us with their Manufactures and receive our Oil and Ashes in return — the Object of the proposed Convention, and the disposition in their States from which it results, ought also to engage their attention.[1] —

We learn from the Knox papers, preserved in such admirable shape in the library of the "New England Historic Genealogical Society" that Massachusetts influences were brought strongly to bear upon Congress in order to increase the troops in service in New England — this being accomplished by the rumor, devised by somebody and spread freely, of a prospective Indian war. This we discover by

[1] Austin's *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, ii, 5, gives as the list appointed "Lieut. governour Cushing, Elbridge Gerry, Francis Dana and Stephen Higginson."

a letter from Knox and another in reply to it from Stephen Higginson. The Indian war, apparently, went no farther, but the increase in the army on that account helped to extinguish the danger from Shays' Rebellion, while only increasing the solicitude which was preparing the way for the formal union of the Colonies into States. The following is Knox's letter: —

[TO STEPHEN HIGGINSON]

NEW YORK 22 October 1786

MY DEAR SIR

You will find by thenclosed [*sic*] paper that my conjectures about the indian war, were right — Congress were so with the apprehension that they have with great unanimity resolved to augment the troops now in service to a legionary corps of 2040 non commissioned officers and privates.

Although the dispositions of Congress on this occasion are perfect yet their treasury is poor indeed. Recourse must be had for

the immediate exigencies to the monied men. The board of treasury will devise some plan for the reembursement of the Losers but exertions might be made & something might be hazarded, by the rich.

Knowing your zeal for Republic welfare, and your knowledge of our warm Boston patriots I write you this in confidence that you may be making some arrangements in your own mind to facilitate that application [illegible]

I am my dear Sir
with respect & esteem
Your very humble Svt
H KNOX[1]

This letter was answered as follows: —

BOSTON Nov^r. 12. 1786

MY DEAR SIR

Your Letter 22^d ult: by Capt. north I rec.^d the news was proper, upon the view of a War with the *Indians* & the consequent requisition of Congress, obtained

[1] *Knox Papers*, xix, 31.

GENERAL HENRY KNOX

very speedily & with more ease than I expected. you have in this case taken the best ground. the money wanted for the men will, I trust, be soon raised. the Treasurer has just opened his Loan; & though monied men, like others, are more ready at profession than action, yet, I think their feelings & a regard to their beloved property will induce them to furnish what is immediately wanted. — The present moment is very favorable to the forming further & necessary arrangements, for increasing the dignity & energy of Government. what has been done, must be used as a Stock upon which the best Fruits are to be ingrafted. the public mind is now in a fit State, & will shortly I think become more so, to come forward with a System competent to the great purpose of all Civil arrangements, that of promoting & securing the happiness of Society. as far as I can be conducive to a right improvement of this disposition, so very favorable an open-

ing shall not be lost. — I saw Capt. north but a moment, I intended a private moment with him, but I was by many inconvenient circumstances deprived of it. I have to know what passes in the World, but I had at this moment rather not appear to know it. — I will inform you how things go on & shall be gratified by any proper communications. With respect I have the honor to be Sir

Your very humb Serv[ts]

S: H: —

P. S. shall I pray you to forward the inclosed to Princeton (?).[1]

[Note]. — The subject of the Annapolis Convention having been passed by with so little notice the following list of casual references to it may well be quoted from Barry's *History of Massachusetts*, Commonwealth Period [vol. iii], 266, 267: —

Madison Papers, ii, 694, 695, 697-703.

Sparks's Washington, ix, 507, 508.

Marshall's Washington, v, 90, 91.

[1] *Knox Papers*, xix, 50.

Curtis's History of the Constitution, i, 340, 343, 345, 346, 347.
Life of Hamilton, ii, 374, 375.
Austin's Life of Gerry, ii, 4.
Bradford, ii, 253.
Worcester Magazine, nos. 27 and 28, for Oct. 1786.
Elliot's Debates i, 116.
Letters of the Federal Farmer, 7.
Hamilton's Works, i, 432, ii, 336.
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Marshall's Washington, v, 97.
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VII

SHAYS' INSURRECTION

OR

"THE GENTILITY'S WAR"

1786

"This was the gentility's war." — Bellamy's *The Duke of Stockbridge*, p. 313.

SHAYS' INSURRECTION

"SHAYS' REBELLION" was one of those historic events which gain instead of lose their importance in history as time goes on. Of the Indian war, for which Congress made nominal appropriations in 1786, we hear little afterwards; but a more serious contest — which seemed at first formidable, then trivial, and once more important — was impending. As a rule, a war of five years enriches a small class of the community, usually the mercantile or manufacturing class, and impoverishes the people at large. Paper currency falls in value, public debts increase and private debts are rapidly accumulated, popular conventions begin to be held, and if these accomplish nothing the courts are blamed and perhaps attacked. All this was eminently

true of the American Revolution, and by no one in New England was this result better foreseen, or more clearly pointed out, than by Stephen Higginson. This will be seen in such letters as the following, addressed by him to John Adams in July, 1786: —

"The habits of indolence and dissipation contracted during the War, are very much against our making a right improvement of the advantages we have in possession. the people at large have for several years lived in a manner much more expensive and luxurious, than they have Ability to support, and their Ideas can not now be brought to comport, with their real situation and means of living. hence, there is nothing they now so much dread, as the parting with any portion of that property, the whole of which they feel to be incompetent to satisfy their Desires. this is an Evil it is true, which will work its own Cure; and was

there force in our Government to compel the payment of Taxes, the Cure might be accelerated. but in our situation, without Energy and without any Funds beside what may be drawn from the people by Taxes, it is a serious and important Question, whether our Government may not get unhinged, and a revolution take place, before the Cure be effected, and the people at large discover, that to secure their liberties and the great bulk of their property a certain portion of the latter must be parted with. we appear to be verging fast to a Crisis. A change of Ideas and measures must soon happen, either from conviction or from necessity; when it does take place, I hope it will be for the better; it will then behove every man of property and influence to aim at giving the Tide a right direction." [1]

Shays' insurrection broke out in Western Massachusetts in August, 1786; an

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 740.

insurrection which carried with it for a time the sympathy, according to Von Holst, of one half the population of the State; and which at one time, according to General Lincoln, brought out 12,000 rebels under arms. Most of those in the ranks had been soldiers in the Revolution, and Captain Daniel Shays himself had been an officer in that war. It was a period of extreme poverty, after a great war; the imports of the nation were three times as great as its exports; gold was growing very scarce, and paper money was almost valueless. Bargaining took place chiefly through the scanty products of long-neglected farms; and the editor of the Worcester "Spy" took subscriptions in salt pork. In Virginia, tobacco was the chief medium of retail commerce, and in North Carolina, whiskey.[1] The annual tax in Massachusetts amounted to an average of $200 to a family. The

[1] Bellamy's *Duke of Stockbridge*, vii.

winters were cold as now, and had only open fires to combat them; on Sunday the meeting-houses were without even a stove, and the ministers wore gowns and bands outside their overcoats, if at all, and turned the notes of their sermons with thick woolen mittens on their hands.[1]

It was not strange that the rebellion began in the western part of the State, then and always its poorest part; and that its peculiar object of hostility was found in the sessions of the legal courts which were largely broken up by it as far east as Worcester and even Concord.[2] It was also a period when social classes were strongly divided, this division being still based on the conditions prevailing before the Revolution; the gentry wearing wigs, silk stockings, and silver shoe buckles, and the lower classes wearing corduroy coats and leather knee breeches, and going largely barefooted in summer. In short,

[1] Bellamy's *Duke of Stockbridge*, 284. [2] *Ibid.* 203.

the insurrection was to a large extent what Mr. Bellamy in his "Duke of Stockbridge," the only vivid description of it, calls it — "The Gentility's War."

A mob met on August 22, 1786, at Hatfield, Massachusetts, and severely censured the action of the courts. The outcome was that on the last Tuesday of August about 1500 insurgents assembled under arms at Northampton and took possession of the court-house. In spite of a proclamation from the Governor, the same thing was repeated at Worcester by a body numbering 300 and upwards. Similar attempts, more or less successful, were made in the counties of Bristol and Berkshire, and finally in Middlesex.

The alarm spread rapidly to Boston. Governor Bowdoin issued a proclamation calling the Legislature together, to meet on September 27, 1786. In the interval the leading men in Boston summoned a meeting at Faneuil Hall on September 9,

JAMES BOWDOIN

at which Samuel Adams was moderator. A committee consisting of Samuel Adams, James Sullivan, Dr. Charles Jarvis, Stephen Higginson, Edward Paine, and Jonathan Jackson (Higginson's partner) were appointed to prepare an address to the Governor expressing disapproval of the riots in the interior and readiness to assist the government in every measure taken to preserve the constitutional rights of the people. The address was presently reported and also a circular to the several towns, after the old Revolutionary form.[1]

In spite of all this there came the outbreak led by Daniel Shays. Hardly attaining the dignity of a single pitched battle, it yet, for a time, broke up courts and substituted the sweeping excitements of mob law, while the promptest and most energetic action was needed to suppress it. The need of its suppression brought to-

[1] Wells's *Life of Samuel Adams*, iii, 225; Barry's *History of Massachusetts*, iii, 230–238.

gether Hancock and Samuel Adams, who had hitherto disagreed and had both been opposed to the Constitution in its original draft. When the insurgent forces had come as far eastward as Concord, it seemed time for energetic action. The Governor and Council ordered that warrants should be issued for arresting the head men of the insurgents in Middlesex and imprisoning them without bail; and for the execution of these warrants a party of horsemen who had voluntarily associated in defense of the government, under Colonel Benjamin Hichborn, was ordered forth early in the morning of the 29th of November, 1786. The force under his command proceeded immediately to Concord taking recruits on the way, until they amounted to about one hundred. Two of the leading insurgents, Parker and Page, were arrested, but Shattuck, the principal leader, had escaped. Amid a violent snowstorm at midnight the party marched on to Shattuck's house

in Groton, where they found that he had fled to the woods, whither he was pursued and discovered, not however surrendering until he had received several wounds.

The "Independent Chronicle"[1] gives this extract from a Worcester letter dated two days previously: —

"Too much credit cannot be given the officers and men on this occasion who performed a long and disagreeable march, a great part of the way in the night, in a heavy snowstorm." . . . "Groton is about 43 miles from this town, so that what with the direct course and the chase which they had before the seizure of Shattuck, who immediately fled to the woods, upon being discovered behind a barn, many of the company must have rode near one hundred miles from Wednesday morning to Thursday evening, and were some of them nine hours on horse-back without scarcely dismounting in that time." This

[1] *Independent Chronicle*, December 7, 1786.

was at least a tolerably severe ordeal for hitherto peaceful citizens.

The object of the warrant being thus obtained, the party came back to Boston on the next day but one after their departure, having penetrated the country for nearly fifty miles. "The short time in which this excursion was performed with so large a body, and the extreme severity of the weather, rendered the execution of this service as honourable to the gentlemen who subjected themselves to it, as their motives in the undertaking were commendable.

"This expedition was a very important event. . . . The advantages derived from the capture of the prisoners were material. The heart of the insurrection in Middlesex was broken by so sudden a stroke, while the friends to good order received a confidence from the strength and success of their cause."[1]

[1] Minot's *History of Insurrections in Massachusetts*, pp. 77, 78.

All this would have no bearing upon the theme of the present work, but for the fact which seems unquestionable that Stephen Higginson went as second in command in this extemporized party of rough riders. The force of early habits, one might suppose, would have been enough to keep a sailor from all direct share in a midnight foray in a snowstorm, particularly on horseback; but we must remember how universal it was for the gentry of that period to take all their journeys in that way, and that he had doubtless gone to and from the seat of government in no other manner. No reference to the subject is to be found among his letters, and only one line of evidence upon the subject exists anywhere, but that seems quite conclusive. A book was published in the year 1834, entitled "Familiar Letters on the Public Men of the Revolution, including Events, 1783–1815." The author of this book was William Sullivan, whose father, James Sullivan,

was Governor of Massachusetts. William Sullivan himself was born in 1774 and died in 1837. He graduated at Harvard in 1792 and received the degree of LL.D. in 1826. He had held many public offices in Massachusetts, was a brigadier-general of militia and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, American Philosophical Society, and the Massachusetts Historical Society. No family in Massachusetts stood higher for a series of generations than the Sullivans, and I mention these details because it is through him and him alone that we have authority for the statement that Stephen Higginson did military service at the time of Shays' Rebellion, nor does even he tell this of his own knowledge. It is however incidentally mentioned, as if a well-known fact, in a letter stated as having been written by a personal friend of the late "Judge Lowell" and of the late "Mr. Higginson," mention being put in the form

of a question addressed to General Hichborn: "Did you not go out with Stephen Higginson as your second in command, to suppress the insurrection of 1786 and did you ever lisp a word against him till now?"[1]

I have tried in vain to ascertain who was the writer of this supposed letter to General Hichborn, but it seems altogether probable that it was General James Sullivan, eldest son of Governor Sullivan, this son being a man who was himself engaged in the pursuit of Shays, and indeed died a few years later from the fatigues of this very contest.[2] It leaves little doubt, at any rate, that Stephen Higginson was at least a member of the expedition whose story has been briefly told.

It can also hardly be doubted that he was at least one of those Boston merchants, those "first characters" who saved

[1] Sullivan's *Familiar Letters*, pp. 379, 380.

[2] N. E. Historical and Genealogical *Register*, xix, 304.

the standing of the State, as recorded by General Lincoln in the following passage of his report to the President: —

Feby. 22. 1787

Thus far I had written as early as December, and should have forwarded the letter at that time, but had some hopes that the Governor and Council would take some measures for crushing the insurgents. This however hung in suspense until the beginning of January. It was then agreed to raise two thousand men in the Counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex, and four companies of Artillery; twelve hundred men in the County of Hampshire; and twelve hundred men in the County of Worcester. The command of the troops was to be given to me, being the first Major General in the State. At this moment, when every part of the system was digested, and nothing remained but the offering the order to raise the men, and carry it into execution, information was received

from the Commissary General that the necessary supplies could not be obtained without a considerable sum in cash, which was not within the power of the Treasurer to borrow. On my hearing this from the Governor, I went immediately to a club of the first characters in Boston, who met that night, and laid before them a full state of matters, and suggested to them the importance of their becoming loaners of part of their property, if they wished to secure the remainder. A subscription was set on foot in the morning, headed by the Governor. Before night the cloud which twenty-four hours before hung over us disappeared as we had an assurance of obtaining the sum we wanted.[1]

From a gathering like this, we may well be sure the leading merchant of Boston was not absent.

[1] Letters of General Lincoln to Washington in Sparks MSS., no. 57, pp. 6, 7. The original letter is in the Department of State at Washington.

VIII

THE NINE STATES IN CONVENTION

(1787)

"Should there be a general Convention in May, and they proceed to form a federal Constitution, I wish to have them empowered to perfect the system, and give it immediate operation, if *nine states in Convention shall agree to it*, without a reference to Congress or their Constituents" — *Stephen Higginson, Letter to General H. Knox, February* 8, 1787.

THE NINE STATES IN CONVENTION

It is needless to pursue farther the personal relation, if any, of Stephen Higginson to the current events of Shays' Rebellion. The whole history of that really important contest has at last been well written for the first time by Joseph Parker Warren and published in the "American Historical Review" for October, 1905. It has also been sketched more lightly by the late Edward Bellamy, whose novel called "The Duke of Stockbridge, a Romance of Shays' Rebellion," was written by him, as is now known, before the more famous novels that were produced by him in later years, when his socialistic tendencies had made merely historical work seem to him unimportant.

But while immediate events were pass-

ing, Stephen Higginson's mind was busily occupied, and his judgment now seems, on publication of his correspondence, to have been clearer and firmer than that of any public man of his time, unless it be in case of President Washington and General Knox, the latter of whom was directly and Washington more indirectly under the influence of Higginson.

We see by the following extract from a letter to General Knox, Secretary of War, how carefully Stephen Higginson watched the course of events, and how clearly he saw, what many others did not, that the disturbances under Shays were not only, in his phrase, "much more deeply rooted" than was apprehended, but that they had at least the advantage of furnishing the very strongest argument in favor of a more efficient general government than a mere confederacy could ever furnish. The following is his statement of the matter: —

Boston, February 13th, 1787.

The expedition under Gen[l] Lincoln has been very successful, the opposition to Government is at present prostrated; but the disaffection is evidently much more deeply rooted, and extensive, than was apprehended; and when the Army shall be withdrawn, rebellion may again soon erect its daring Standards and openly defy our feeble Government. the continuation of our Army in the field, will not only consume the funds which have been furnished by a voluntary Loan, but will retard the enlistments of men into Jackson's Corps. these circumstances will much impede the perfecting of that body of men for the field; and as large Sums are necessary for supporting the militia, which can not be raised but in the way of Loan, I fear that the money wanted for cloathing the men of Jackson's Corps will not easily be obtained. Lincoln's expedition will be so much more tedious and expensive than we appre-

hended at first, as to call for all the Money that can be speedily raised by Loan, instead of leaving a good Sum, from what is already subscribed, for Jackson's use. — You will endeavour no doubt to draw strong Arguments from the insurrection in this State in favour of an efficient General Government for the Union. As all the States are at least equally exposed with this to such Commotions, and none of them are capable of the exertions we have made, they will have reason to fear the worst consequences to themselves, unless the Union shall have force enough to give the same effectual aid in a like case. — Those who now have the administration of Government in the several States and for the Union, must seize every opportunity to increase its energy and stability; or Insurgents will soon rise up, and take the reins from them. this consideration, which I take to be founded in truth, and the nature of things, should guard those in office and

power from an undue and ill timed modesty, as to the means to be used for increasing the powers of Government, and the manner of exercising them when acquired —

These are Sentiments too free and bold to be, as yet, very freely and generally held forth; but the time is coming, and every man in his sphere should contribute to accelerate its arrival, when they will be very popular and generally practiced upon. But, as it is yet at some distance, you will, I am persuaded, not too openly hand them out, even as those of another. I write you see in confidence. and I remain respectfully

Your hum[l] Serv[t]
STEPHEN HIGGINSON[1]

This inference may have been drawn by others also, though perhaps not stated by any one else so forcibly. Congress, at any rate, passed a resolution on February 21,

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 751, 752.

recommending a convention of the states. On February 22, the Massachusetts Legislature resolved that delegates be sent,— these delegates having been already conditionally appointed, — and Stephen Higginson says approvingly of this action, "The [members of the] legislature have behaved well and conducted [themselves] with spirit." He writes in a letter to Nathan Dane, March 3, 1787, as follows: —

. . . It is clear in my mind, that we cannot long exist under our present system; and that unless we soon acquire more force to the Union by some means or other, Insurgents will arise and eventually take the reins from us; I am for trying any measure that promises even a possibility of success. We must either brace up the powers of the Union to a degree capable of supporting and encouraging the affairs of the nation with dignity and energy, and this by an act of deliberation and choice or we

shall inevitably be thrown into general confusion and convulsions, which will result in one or more Governments, established with the loss of much blood, violent and despotic in its nature, and the effect of necessity and chance. In this situation, when no other mode is suggested which affords even a gleam of hope, I am clearly of opinion that to decline a proposition of this kind, though the effect may be very uncertain, would be imprudent—for I cannot see that, in any event, the result of the Convention can be against us. If no system can there be advised to save us from confusion and distress, and we must take our chance for what may arise out of a general disorder, the sooner we are brought to a decision upon this point the better; it is surely uncomfortable to remain longer in our present situation, and the sooner and more rapidly disorder overtakes us, the shorter will its duration be and of less extent will probably be the

political distress which will result. While we have any hope of warding off the evil by means of a convention, we shall not patiently submit to a temporary anarchy, nor propose to claim any advantages from a state of convulsion; but having tried the experiment and found that our National Government must arise out of necessity alone, and be the effect of confusion, we shall then give way to dire necessity, and with vigilance turn every event to a good purpose. —

The papers will have informed you of the doings of the Government — the Legislature have behaved well and conducted with spirit — they have adopted an energetic system of policy with respect to the rebels, perhaps in some instances they have carried their resentment too far. the rebellion appears to be in a good degree crushed, the force of the rebels is dispersed. But the seeds yet remain in the soil, the spirit of faction and rebellion is

far from being subdued; nor can it be rooted out without the cooperation of the other N. E States — while our rebels can find a shelter in those States, they will not only retain this disposition themselves, but they will communicate it to the Citizens of those States, whose minds are as prone to rebellion as ours, and from the same causes. the evil appears to me to arize naturally and necessarily out of our case. the people of the interior parts of these States have by far too much political knowledge and too strong a relish for unrestrained freedom, to be governed by our feeble system, and too little acquaintance with real sound policy or rational freedom and too little virtue to govern themselves. they have become too well acquainted with their own weight in the political scale, under such governments as ours and have too high a taste for luxury and dissipation, to sit down contented in their proper line, when they see others possessed of much

more property than themselves. with these feelings and sentiments, they will not be quiet while such distinctions exist as to rank and property; and sensible of their own force, they will not rest easy till they possess the reins of Government, and have divided property with their betters, or they shall be compelled by force to submit to their proper stations and mode of living.

Which of these events are the most likely to happen, and how, is in my mind very uncertain. The end of this rebellion both as to the time and manner of it equally so of course.

I have not time to add, only to desire you to forward the inclosed letter and some news papers if you have any to spare to my son Nat. the next leisure hour I will write you again

Adieu yours &c

S Higginson[1]

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 753, 754.

It was easy enough to see the dangers threatened to New England by Shays' Rebellion, but it was not every one who saw that the only remedy for such troubles must be found in a more complete union of the states. Of those who saw this, Stephen Higginson was plainly one of the leaders. I have been unable to find that in any other correspondence of that day the precise point at issue was so clearly stated as in his.

He had written on the subject more fully, a few weeks before, to General Knox: —

Boston, February 8th, 1787.

Gen. H. Knox

Dear Sir.

Your Letter of 28th last Month I have received, and am pleased to find that your Sentiments and my own are so exactly coincident as to the subject of it; and there is so good a prospect of a general Convention in May, as you have

represented. As early as '83, while I was at Congress, I pressed upon Mr. Maddison and others the Idea of a special Convention, for the purpose of revising the Confederation, and increasing the powers of the Union; the obtaining of which, we all agreed to be essential to our national dignity and happiness. But they were as much opposed to this Idea, as I was to the measures they were then pursuing, to effect, as they said, the same thing. They have, however, now adopted the Idea, and have come forward with a proposition to attempt practising upon it.

It is an agreed, and, as I conceive, a clear point, that the Confederation is incompetent to the purposes for which it was established, the managing the Affairs of the Union. Powers delineated on paper cannot alone be sufficient, the Union must not only have the right to make Laws and requisitions, but it must have the power also of compelling obedience thereto,

otherwise our federal Constitution will be a mere dead letter.

. . . . . .

This State entered into the measure of appointing a general Convention the last year with much readiness; but the Sentiments delivered to the two houses by Mr. King and Mr. Dane, have produced a great change in the disposition of the members. Those Gentlemen, I fancy, have now different Ideas of the matter, and will not now think there is so great a resemblance between our County Conventions, in their views and principles, and that proposed to be held at Philadelphia in May, as they then thought, nor will they now imagine the same danger can result to the Union from the latter, as our experience has proved was justly apprehended from the former to this Commonwealth. — I hope that the two houses will this Session come into the measure, and appoint Delegates; but I have some doubts, whether they can

so soon be brought off from the sentiments they have imbibed from Mr. King and Mr. Dane.

If a delegation should take place, Mr. King will probably be in it, was I to nominate, I should write thus "King, Lowell, Dana, Parsons and Gerry." Mr. Jackson, Mr. Cabot and others if they would engage might be added, or substituted in case of failure. As to myself I am out of the question, having neither qualities nor leisure for the Business.

Should there be a general Convention in May, and they proceed to form a federal Constitution, I wish to have them empowered to perfect the system, and give it immediate operation, if nine states in Convention shall agree to it, without a reference to Congress, or their Constituents — for much time must otherwise be lost, and perhaps such a difference of Sentiment may arise, as to the report, as may entirely defeat the object. Next to this, I should

prefer having their report referred to Congress, and if there approved of by nine States, they to be authorized to give it immediate operation. But I fear the States cannot be brought to either of these points.

. . . . . .

Your very hum'l Servant

STEPHEN HIGGINSON[1]

In the opinion of that careful historian Jameson, who prepared the report of the "Historical Manuscripts Commission" of the American Historical Association for 1896, this letter contained the first suggestion of the precise method by which the United States Constitution was finally established and the Confederation, whose defects Higginson had pointed out so clearly, came to an end. On February 21, 1787, a resolution was moved and carried in Congress recommending a convention to meet in Philadelphia on the second Monday

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 745, 747, 748.

of May "for the purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation, and reporting to Congress, and the several legislatures, such alterations and provisions therein as shall, when agreed to in Congress and confirmed by the States, render the federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and the preservation of the Union." [1]

As a result of this action of Congress the representatives of twelve States assembled, Rhode Island being alone unrepresented. In regard to the selection of members from Massachusetts, Judge Sullivan wrote thus to Rufus King on September 25: "Five are to be chosen. Who they will be is very uncertain. Dana and Gerry are on nearly all the lists; you are on many; Higginson and Lowell on some, and also Gorham. He objects to all lawyers; others to members of Congress. The merchants say it is all a matter of commerce, and that merchants are the men. I have the honor

[1] Story's *Commentaries of the Constitution* (ed. 1833), p. 107.

to be mentioned, but shall not be chosen, and should not go if I were. The choice will be this week."[1] The delegates from Massachusetts elected were Francis Dana, Elbridge Gerry, Nathaniel Gorham, Caleb Strong, and Rufus King.[2] Dana, however, did not attend; Higginson had declined, as he was, according to his kinsman Lowell, in the habit of doing, where possible.

It is noticeable that at the same time when this convention was being held, the "American Museum" at Philadelphia (edited by Matthew Carey) contained an address to Congress from fifteen merchants of Boston, apparently appointed by a public meeting, pointing out the inconveniences endured by American commerce and lamenting the unfortunate delinquency of some States in the Union

[1] Amory's *Sullivan*, i, 218.

[2] See also Barry's *History of Massachusetts*, iii, 270; Curtis's *History of the Constitution*, i, 516–518.

in withholding the necessary powers from Congress. John Hancock headed the list and Stephen Higginson was one of the signers. The same number of the "American Museum" contained an editorial reflecting indignantly on Rhode Island for establishing a mint of her own, while another contribution contrasted her with Vermont and proposed her dismemberment.

General Washington, it is believed, was induced by Shays' Rebellion to attend the Constitutional Convention,[1] about which he had also written, "I highly approve of all the defensive and precautionary measures that have been adopted, and wish they had been more energetic."[2] After long debate the plan of the present Constitution was adopted; and the convention, in voting to lay it before Congress,

[1] Curtis's *History of the Constitution*, i, 400; Sparks's *Writings of Washington*, ix, 253.

[2] Gibbs's *Administration of Washington and Adams*, ii, 60.

further proposed that it should afterwards be submitted to a delegate convention in each State for its ratification. It also provided that so soon as nine States had ratified this Constitution, Congress should fix a day for the choice of presidential electors. This especial proposal as to the number of votes made requisite for an acceptance of the Constitution by the nation proceeded, as we have seen, from Stephen Higginson. It is to be noticed, moreover, that Story points out in his final narrative of these events that "The alarming insurrection then existing in Massachusetts, without doubt, had no small share in producing this result."[1] It was by actual service in that insurrection that Stephen Higginson had learned the lesson as to the need of a stronger government.

All this situation now brings us to the "conciliatory resolutions" drawn up by Theophilus Parsons of Massachusetts and

[1] Story's *Commentaries of the Constitution* (ed. 1833), p. 107.

presented before the convention of that State on January 31, 1788.[1] On that day, John Hancock, who had been detained by illness, real or nominal, for a few days, took the chair, and brought in what was called by the newspapers of the day the "conciliatory proposition," the original draft of which was found among Hancock's papers in Parsons's own handwriting after his death. The resolutions now introduced silenced the chief opposition among the delegates by beginning with this section: "First. That it be explicitly declared, that all powers not expressly delegated to Congress are reserved to the several States, to be by them exercised."[2] Even these amendments only secured the passage of the whole instrument by a majority of 19 out of 355 votes cast; but when once adopted the leading opponents gave in their adher-

[1] Parsons's *Life of Parsons*, p. 68.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 67.

ence to it at once. The new Constitution was now virtually established, though still subject to vote by several other States. In Boston there was especial rejoicing; there were meetings, processions, dinners, and fireworks. A ballad sung about the streets summed it up thus: —

Then 'Squire Hancock, like a man
Who dearly loves the nation,
By a concil'atory plan,
Prevented much vexation.
Yankee doodle, keep it up!
Yankee doodle, dandy!
Mind the music and the step,
And with the girls be handy.[1]

[1] Parsons's *Life of Parsons*, p. 69.

IX

LACO AND HIS LETTERS

(1789)

King Agis said, "The Lacedæmonians are not wont to ask how many, but where the enemy are." — *Plutarch.*

LACO AND HIS LETTERS

THE eminently candid editor of Stephen Higginson's letters, for publication by the American Historical Association, while pronouncing Higginson's views on public affairs to be "temperate and far-seeing," adds, with some justice, "The sureness and serenity of his judgment was, indeed, much diminished by partisanship. The reputed author of the 'Laco' letters was never just to Hancock, to the anti-Federalists of 1788, or to the 'Jacobins' of 1795 and 1798."[1]

The "Laco" Letters were published anonymously, after the fashion of that day, in the "Massachusetts Centinel" during February and March, 1789, and were reprinted in a pamphlet in the following year. They were aimed at the richest man in Boston, who was also the first signer of

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 708.

the Declaration of Independence. It is worth while, before giving selections from them, to quote also a candid estimate made by that careful critic, George S. Hillard, not of Hancock directly, but of one whose views of Hancock were quite as severe as Stephen Higginson's, namely, James Savage, the eminent historian. In writing his sketch of Savage's character for the Massachusetts Historical Society, Mr. Hillard's opinion was summed up as follows. After speaking of Mr. Savage's severity on Cotton Mather he goes on: —

". . . Especially there were two men, in his [Savage's] own State, one living in the seventeenth and one in the eighteenth century, toward whom his feelings were akin to personal antipathy: these were Cotton Mather and John Hancock. In the case of Cotton Mather, his grounds of offence were his credulity, his rashness of statement, and, above all, his habits of carelessness and inaccuracy. . . .

JOHN HANCOCK

"His objections to John Hancock were of a different kind, though they may be traced back to his consistent and invincible love of truth. He felt keenly the difference between what he deemed Hancock's real character and that conceded to him by public estimation. He considered him as enjoying a reputation founded upon accidental circumstances, and to which he had no substantial claim. He did not think that his patriotic services in trying times gave him any title to have his weaknesses or his foibles ignored. Among these weaknesses, Mr. Savage regarded his vanity and his love of popularity, — infirmities to which the sturdy independence of his own character made him, perhaps, uncharitable. John Hancock, in his eyes, was a brilliant specimen of dust o'ergilded. He [Savage] retained in his memory many traditionary anecdotes which were at variance with the received impressions concerning him; and he took the more pleasure in recounting

them, because he held that strict justice required they should be known. Mankind is generally disposed to forget the infirmities and weaknesses of eminent patriots who prove true to their country in the day of trial, whatever may have been the motives upon which they acted. That John Hancock's name was first set to the Declaration of Independence has given him a sure title to immortality. It is, as Mr. Webster says, as if 'he had written his name between Orion and the Pleiades.'" [1]

Turning now to Laco's view, we find the following estimate: —

"Mr. H., [Hancock] by the death of his uncle, became possessed of a large estate. He was thought to have some of the exterior graces necessary to form a popular character, and he early discovered a strong inclination for popular applause. These qualities rendered him a

[1] Massachusetts Historical Society *Proceedings*, 1878, pp. 152, 153.

proper object for the *effective patriots* of the day to bring forward to favour their views. They availed themselves of his great desire for popularity, and they represented him as a man useful in the cause of liberty, to give him importance in the eyes of the people — his vanity favoured their views — he was captivated with the idea of being a publick man — a man of the people — and he was lavish of his money, and in his attention to the people, to gain their affections. To render him conspicuous, they assigned him a part in their manœuvres, not important, but ostentatious; but having early discovered his caprice, they did not admit him to their private councils. Though they considered him as a useful instrument, and were desirous of retaining him in their service, they had no confidence in his attachment to their cause, nor did they ever intrust him with any thing that could much injure it, by being disclosed.

"Upon these principles, and with these views, was he introduced into publick life, by the leaders of the opposition to Britain at that day. But though upon publick principles, he was introduced into the Legislature, and made to appear as a man of importance, he had not in fact any more efficiency, than the pen of the writer under the signature of MASSACHUSETTENSIS; and it was often with great pains they prevented him from going over to the other side. So great was his vanity, and so excessive his caprice, that his leaders were often at a loss to restrain and keep him steady. His character and his passions were so well known to *Bernard* and *Hutchinson*, *&c.*, that they could always attempt his seduction with a prospect of success; and they would several times have gained him to their party, but for the vigilant eyes of the two Adamses, and Otis, *&c.* Nor did he, during the period I refer to, ever do a single honour-

able or important act that I have heard of, either by originating or carrying a measure, or furnishing money for any great and general purposes. Though lavish of his money, he always confined his gratuities to objects of the glaring, captivating kind, rather than to those really important, and extensively useful.

"That was Mr. H.'s [Hancock's] political character and conduct, from his first introduction into publick life, to his being appointed a member of Congress, I verily believe; and I would refer those who may doubt it, to Mr. S. A. [Samuel Adams], and others, who were his political creators and supporters, who knew every thing that took place at that time, and who have spoken freely and openly of his demerits. I would also refer them to the letters of *Hutchinson*, *Bernard*, and others, which have been published, for the proof of his wavering repeatedly, as to the side he should take; and for their

ideas, as to his firmness or integrity. And yet, it was during this very period that he is said to have deserved so much of the publick, and to have conferred such obligations as can never be repaid. But I now call on his advocates to state the important transactions he there performed, or to show us how and in what instances he wasted his property to serve the publick, more than others did, of much less estate than he enjoyed."[1]

Elsewhere he goes on:—

"Mr. H. [Hancock] was, as we have seen, at the early part of our contest with Britain, a young man with a very large fortune, and some exterior qualities well enough adapted to form a popular character; but with a disposition so very capricious, susceptible of flattery, and prone to vanity, it was very difficult to keep him steady and to render him, with all the advantages he possessed, beneficial to the

[1] *Writings of Laco* (Boston, Original Edition, 1789), pp. 4, 5.

public. These obstacles, however, did not discourage the once venerable old patriot, and his compeers in politicks, from persevering in their object of making him a useful agent in the cause; and they succeeded, after much labour and watching, so far as to fix him on their side, and to give him importance in the eyes of the people. But they were much disappointed, in the degree of advantage they derived from his being eventually with them. They could draw no aids from his fortune to relieve the pressing exigencies of the State; nor could they restrain his vanity, to make him act with consistency, decision or dignity: and, we have accordingly seen, that from his first entering into publick life, to his return from Congress, he always required a steady hand and a vigilant eye, to prevent him from running into the utmost excess of levity, or personal selfishness. We might reasonably have presumed, that the precepts and examples of

the patriots who brought him forward and supported him in publick life would have had some effect upon Mr. H. and that his natural levity would have been checked, by several years' intercourse with such characters. But we find he had so long indulged his various passions, and had been so pampered by a tribe of sycophants, who were always around him, that he became extremely averse to every thing serious, and soon got to be a bitter enemy to those who attempted to arrest his attention, even for a moment to matters of importance. Conscious of his own want of merit, and persuaded that every thoughtful, steady man must soon grow weary of his being in the chair, and wish to displace him, he made an implicit obedience to his will, and devotedness to his interest the only conditions upon which he would appoint to office, and he used his prerogative as a weapon of defence, to encourage those who were enlisted in his service, and to

annoy or intimidate those, who appeared to be startled or grieved at his excesses. Hence proceeded that swarm of unworthy officers, in the various branches of the Executive department, who disgraced the Government, and preyed upon the people, until they grew uneasy, and were ripe for rebellion. When the natural effects of his own foibles became visible, and he saw that his downfall was at hand, he endeavoured to save himself, and revive his popularity by the stale artifice of appearing desirous of returning to the state of a private citizen. This failed him, and he was deeply provoked and mortified to find himself reduced to a situation, in which he was deprived of the pageantry of State, and the glare of office, which used to veil his defects from the eyes of the multitude; and he soon set himself most industriously at work, to increase the popular irritation, which he had before excited by improper appointments. The distressing effects of

late insurrections, which we still feel, or recollect, ought to rouse our indignation against Mr. H. and his adherents, who, wantonly, or rather selfishly, involved us in that dreadful situation by misrepresentations, and solely for the purpose of again recovering the chair of Government. That this event was produced by their agency, cannot be doubted, when we recollect their conduct and language at that time — that he was supported universally by the insurgents at the next election — that papers with his name, and that of one of his principal agents were used as passports through the insurgents' lines, — and that even those who were devoted to justice, by the law of their country, were assured of and enjoyed his protection when again clothed with the prerogative of pardon." [1]

It is probable that posterity will not be closely affected by anything now said to limit the reputation of John Hancock, for

[1] *Writings of Laco*, pp. 36–38.

when a man has the good fortune to be identified with great events, and has the wealth or energy to make himself thus useful, it is difficult for those of the next generation to go behind these obvious facts. If too severe reproof brings reaction, this was certainly the case with the Laco letters. Loring, in his "Hundred Boston Orators" (p. 110), tells the story that a group of the Boston draymen who were sturdy partisans of Hancock trained a parrot to shout after Higginson, as he walked down State Street, "Hurrah for Hancock! Down with Laco!" My last surviving uncle, James P. Higginson, told me that he had never heard his father mention the subject; but that he himself, walking in the street with him, had heard the schoolboys say, "There goes Laco!" The fact that he lived in an atmosphere thus unfavorable might prove that the man thus designated was unpopular, but would not necessarily prove him to be

wrong. As a matter of fact — as the next chapter will show — his standing among his fellow citizens was never higher or his variety of functions more marked than when he had thus defined his attitude toward Hancock.

X

THE ISLE OF FRANCE

"They order, said I, this matter better in France." — Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*, p. 1.

THE ISLE OF FRANCE

THE following letter, now first published, will show admirably the wealth of practical information and suggestion which this Boston merchant could give to government: —

STEPHEN HIGGINSON TO JOHN ADAMS

Boston 17 Jany 1789

Sir

You may recollect that the Court of France by an edict, about 2 Years since, opened a trade to the Americans to Mauritius and the french Settlements in India, upon the same terms as their own Subjects pursue it. This permission we soon improved, & for two Years past, many vessels have gone to Port Louis in the Isle of France from different parts of the Continent with cargos of the various exports from the Northern middle & South-

ern States. We there found a ready, & a good market for Beef, Pork, Butter & Flour, dried & pickled fish, Wheat, Tobacco, Naval Stores, &c. all the vessels from this State that have gone there, have carried those with some other small Articles. Those from the Middle & Southern States have carried principally their own particular exports. We have taken in return from thence Coffee, Pepper, Hides, Teas and the manufactures of India; & some of those articles have been again exported to Europe and the West Indies with advantage, as Coffee, Teas, pepper Spices & Nankins &c. As the articles we have carried to the Isle of France, have in a good degree been again exported from thence to the various markets in India &c, where a ready & extensive sale has been found for them; this trade would probably in a short time take off great quantities of our american exports, and give employ to a great number of our

Invoice of Sundry Merchandize Shipt by Higginson & West on board the Brig. Nancy on Acct. of Elias H. Derby Esq.

1786	To 36 half ℔ Butter Cont. 1615 ℔ Nett a 8/2		163	8	11
	36 half ℔	216	4	10	
	50 ℔ Beef a 5/		127	10	
	663 ℔ Beef Contained in the 50 ℔ more than the Law allowes a 2½		6	18	1
	26 ℔ Pork a 4/		109	4	
	9 Kegs Butter Cont. 700 ℔ Nett a 9		26	5	
	9 Kegs a 2/			18	
	18 ℔ Pork a 8/		75	12	
	64 ℔ Beef a 5/	£ 163 4			
	44 ℔ Pork a 8/	184 16			
	2052 ℔ Cheese a 5/2	17 6 6			
	6 m Hoops a 70/	21	422		6
	40 ℔ Pork a 8/	168			
	1251 ℔ Cheese a 5/1	27 7 4			
	15 ℔ Beef a 5/	38 5	233	12	4
	79 ℔ Beef a 40/		189	12	
	15 ℔ Pork a 8/	63			
	12 ℔ Beef a 5/	30 12	93	12	
	6 ℔ Pork a 80/		24		
	1 ℔ Beef a		2	8	
	Trucking Beef			12	6
	Warfage of Goods		3	11	9
		£	1483	15	1

Errors Excepted

Boston March 9th 1786

Higginson & West

men & Ships. We find by calculation that not less than 3000 tons of Shipping went to Mauritius the last year from America; & this year I think there will be more than 4000 tons go there, besides those Ships that have been fitted out for China.

From these facts, I think that a free trade to the Mauritius, as was at first granted, must be very important to America, for though the markets in India &c., which have recd our exports from thence may be open to us, generally, it is not easy for us at once to Supply them direct, nor till we Shall have more knowledge of their navigation & trade—beside which the voyages to the Continent would be too long & tedious, for our common traders of small Capitals to pursue them; those to Mauritius are as much so, as the persons who have sent there can in general bear. To have that or any other branch of trade so circumstanced that none but wealthy Individuals, or companies can pursue it is

not to be desired upon public principles. But this trade to the Isle of France we are perhaps in danger of losing, or having it so restricted, as, in a good degree, to deprive us of the advantages we have been led to expect from it. The few french Merchants who reside there, have enjoyed exclusively the Supply of that market with some of the same articles which we carry there; & have generally engrossed to themselves the Crops of Coffee, as well as the India Exports, which have been there Sold. by this means they have commanded their own prices both for their Supplies to their Planters and transient Traders, and for the produce &c exported from thence. we have not only undersold them in the articles we have carried; but by going over to Bourbon where the Coffee is raised, and contracting with the planters, for what we wanted, we got it much cheaper than to have bought it at Port Louis, & taught the

planters to make more of their crops than they had before done, and deprived the Merchants at Port Louis of a profit they used to make at the Planters expence. These diminutions of the merchants gains, resulting from our trade, have made them & their connexions at L'Orient very uneasy; & they have combined, we are told, to Suppress, or at least to restrain Our Trade at that market, by joint representations to the Court of France. They have, indeed, already prevailed on the Commandant at Port Louis, to prevent our vessels from going to Bourbon to buy & take in Coffee; and we now have to take it from the Merchants at Port Louis, at the advanced price of 2 ½ to 3 Dollars per C^{t}. This restriction we might perhaps Support but Should we be liable to any additional ones of moment, we may be obliged to abandon the Trade.

If the french Government should not be misled by false representations, I can-

not suppose they will subject us to any farther embarrassments; but on the contrary, by considering the Subject in a national & Political view, they must be disposed to encourage our Trade, to the Isle of France in particular, & give us all that freedom which they at first intended, and we enjoyed. The local situation of that Island is peculiarly favourable to annoy the British trade to India & China, and to protect their own. It may indeed be viewed as the Key to both the Chinese & Indian Seas from Europe. No Ship can pass for either of them without being in a great degree Subject to the Cruisers Stationed at the Isle of France; & if a free trade is permitted to us, they certainly will have every Supply, & every advantage for cruising upon the British from thence. that Island will certainly Soon become the Place of deposit, for American, Chinese & Indian exports. We shall carry to them, all the various products of

America, that will answer in those Seas, and shall want in return the produce & exports of the east — our vessels will lodge the former, and take the latter in return. The french Ships, or the natives from the Continent will bring their exports, & take ours away for other markets. Such a Trade will not only employ the French Ships in carrying our exports to other Markets from Mauritius, & in bringing theirs in return for us to take away; but very great advantages beside must be derived from it. It is impossible but the Settlement must, with such advantages, soon become very wealthy & important; it will certainly be resorted to by other Europeans, and all the various nations inhabiting the Shores in those Seas. It will in this way soon become the general Magazine for Naval Stores, & for provisions of every kind. In a political view, no event can be more desireable. It will enable the french to operate against the british in

any future rupture with amazing advantage. They will then have an important Port filled, not only with Provisions & military Stores, but with Active enterprizing & wealthy inhabitants.

Should the immediate effect of our trade be to Supplant, or even to ruin the few Merchants now residing at Port Louis, it would be of no moment in a national view, since it must inevitably establish great numbers in their Stead. But even this cannot happen, unless from their own folly & imprudence, for though they may be deprived, by means of our trade, of the profits on the business they before pursued; they certainly may avail themselves in Common with others, of the many new openings for beneficial Commerce, which result from it.

It appears to me that the french Court acted with great wisdom and policy when they open'd those ports to us; & the same principles which induc'd them to do it,

will retain their weight in favour of the measure, while the trade of Europe with India, China and the relative Interests of France & Britain, in those Seas remain as they now are: and if I am not mistaken, as to the views & Intent of the french Court, upon this Subject, there can be no doubt of Mr Jefferson being able to prevent any new restrictions upon our vessels, & to obtain for them the same liberty which they at first enjoyed.

With these sentiments, as to the importance of a free trade to those Seas, I thought it could not be improper to State to you the foregoing facts & observations. Should they have weight in your mind, you may perhaps advance the Interest of America by making some representation to Mr. Jefferson on the Subject.

With much respect I have the honour to be Sir your very humble Servant

STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

[1] *Jefferson Papers*, Library of Congress, series 2, vol. i, no. 62.

XI

MUNICIPAL LIFE IN BOSTON
(1790–1804)

"The public mind, to judge from this part of the Union, has kept pace with the times." — *Stephen Higginson, 1790, MS.*

MUNICIPAL LIFE IN BOSTON

It appears from Stephen Higginson's letters to General Knox that he took a more favorable view of the future than that held by most of the Federalists. The following letter, dated April 7, 1790, deals with this matter far more cheerfully than was common among that waning class during this period:—

"The Sentiments you express, as to the future prospects of Our Country are very natural, when judging by the past, and reasoning from analogy. in that view of the Subject, there appears too much reason to fear yet farther fluctuations, if not changes, in the tempers, and dispositions of the people toward the Government of the Union. But it appears to me, that a general alteration in the habits and feelings of the people has taken place for the better;

and that many new circumstances have arisen; tending to increase the force and respectability of Government, and to give a strong impression of the necessity of its being supported. — Habits of industry and frugality are taking place of those of luxury and dissipation, more generally and with more celerity than I expected. it is a growing Idea, that the manners contracted during the War must be done away; and that every Class of Citizens must expect only to thrive by the means commonly successful in a time of peace. — With such Sentiments impressed on the minds of the body of the people, and the advantages they will derive soon from the System proposed by the Secretary of the treasury, and from some general commercial Arrangements, which may soon be expected, the situation of individuals will become more easy and eligible, and private happiness be more generally enjoyed. from the same causes, I expect, the Government will be gradu-

ally increas'g in its energy and dignity, and will daily extend its protection and blessings. — The public mind, to judge from this part of the Union, has kept pace with the times; and has been prepared, with wonderful success and facility, for new Events. there seems to be a general conviction, that the Union must be supported, as the alone Source of national Security; and that every burthen necessary to the Object must be cheerfully bourne."[1]

Toward the close of 1791, Stephen Higginson was appointed a member of a committee of twenty-one[2] whose chairman was Charles Jarvis, a leader of the Jefferson Party and which contained also Judge Dawes, Judge Tudor, the young John Quincy Adams and others, to consider the existing state of the town of Boston and report some plan for a more efficient man-

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 781.

[2] Quincy's *Municipal History of Boston*, p. 25, note.

agement of its affairs. There had been a previous committee, with Samuel Adams as chairman, which had vainly striven to substitute a city organization for a town government, the population being then about twenty thousand. This second committee reported a somewhat modified plan, but also failed in town meeting, and after two other similar attempts the measure was carried in 1822, when Dr. John Phillips, father of Wendell Phillips, was chosen the first mayor of Boston.[1]

When, in 1794, an embargo for sixty days was ordered by Congress in the hope of inducing Great Britain to cease her depredations through the fear of impoverishing her colonies, a meeting was called of the citizens of Boston to endorse the measure. This was done with some unanimity, but there was some earnest discussion between Sullivan, Jarvis, and Austin, in the affirmative, and Jones, Higginson, and

[1] Compare Amory's *Sullivan*, i, 265.

Otis, on the other side, who desired to state the wish more moderately. Some of the more positive opponents of the measure claimed it to be urged with a view to obstruct the supply of provision to the British forces in the West Indies, then engaged in hostilities with the French republic. The embargo, however, failed of its object, the colonies suffering much less inconvenience than had been anticipated.[1]

The following is quoted from the life of James Sullivan by the patient pen of the late Thomas C. Amory: "The federalists, in the spring of 1796, endeavored through their journals, to induce Governor Adams, upon the ground of his increasing age [seventy-five] and infirmities to decline a reëlection. . . . At the commencement of 1797, however, when the administration of Washington drew to its close, Governor Adams determined to

[1] Amory's *Sullivan*, i, 291; *American Cyclopedia*, article "Embargo."

retire; and the public mind in Massachusetts was much exercised in selecting from the leading politicians of the State the most suitable candidate to fill his place. Judge Cushing, Judge Sumner, General Knox, General Heath, Moses Gill, and Stephen Higginson were among the most prominent. The canvass finally settled down upon Sumner, Sullivan, and Gill."[1]

Young readers of the present day always find it hard to recognize the existence, after the withdrawal of Washington from the presidency, of a dissatisfied minority from which personal attacks on Washington continued to come. This is well brought out in a letter from Stephen Higginson to Timothy Pickering on the approach of Washington's birthday.

BOSTON Feby 22–98.

. . . I have been much diverted at a discussion here as to the propriety of cele-

[1] Amory's *Sullivan*, ii, 54.

KNOW all Men by these Presents,

That I William Foster of Boston Commonwealth of Massachu & County of Suffolk Merchant for and ——

in Consideration of the sum of Eight thousand Dollars ——
paid by Samuel Salisbury Junr & Stephen Higginson Junr both of Boston County & Commonwealth aforesaid Merchants
the Receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge, do hereby give, grant, sell and convey unto the said Samuel Salisbury Junr & Stephen Higginson Junr a Certain Brick Store in Boston aforesaid being at the head of Greenes Wharf so called and bounded in Front on the Street twenty two feet ten Inches Northerly on Greenes Wharf Sixty seven feet eight eight inches including four feet taking off by order of the Town easterly on Warehouse belonging to the Estate of John Rowe Esqr Deceased twenty two feet Eight Inches & Southerly on Land & Stores belonging to Fred Hoeck Sixty seven feet eight Inches including as above with all the privileges & appurtenances & the same ——
belonging: being the same Estate I purchased of the Town as p the Deed from William Phillips Esqr Committee of said Town dated the 16th day of October One thousand seven Hundred & Eighty Seven and confirmed by the inhabitants at a Legal town Meeting at Faneuil Hall on Friday 7th day of December following—

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the afore-granted Premises to the said Samuel & Stephen in severalty not jointly Heirs and Assigns, to their —— Use and Behoof forever.
AND I do covenant with the said Samuel & Stephen
their Heirs and Assigns, That I am lawfully seized in Fee of the afore-granted Premises; That they are free of all Incumbrances; That I have good Right to sell and convey the same to the said Samuel & Stephen
AND that I will warrant and defend the same Premises to the said Samuel & Stephen
their Heirs and Assigns forever, against the lawful Claims and Demands of all Persons.
IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I the said William and Grace my Wife in token of her relinquishing her right of dower & power by these

have hereunto set our Hands and Seals this nineteenth Day of July
in the Year of our LORD One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Six

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered in Presence of us,

N Gorham
Josiah Foster
Holy Otis Witness to Mrs Foster signing

Wm Foster
Grace Foster

Suffolk ss. Boston July 9th 1796 THEN the above-named William Foster acknowledged the above Instrument to be his free Act and Deed—before me,

John Lowell { Justice of the Peace.

brating Mr Washingtons birth day by a public Dinner as usual. by some it is opposed as being antirepublican, by others because he is now only a public Citisen, and others thought it improper and indelicate, and might hurt the presidents feelings. in short it has divided our friends more than any such question ever did before. my own opinion was that it would be improper, unless it was intended to keep the presidents birth day also, when it comes round. But in the present state of things, and whilst a french faction shall continue in our Country, so formidable and so ready to calumniate Mr. W: and Mr. A: with their friends and their measurs, it may be useful to notice them both in this and in every other way, which will express strongly the respect of the people for their characters and their approbation of public measures. it may indeed be eligible to keep this custom up, though we may hereafter have a president less respected and celebrated,

and though it may not appear to comport with the republican Ideas. — Although Mr. W: is out of office, yet he is still the object of Jacobin malice, for the System of policy which all good men approve, and which Mr. A: has with so much firmness and spirit supported, many were unwilling to drop at this moment all public expressions of their love and respect for him. — it has been decided upon this view of the question to keep up the notice of this day, and to be equally attentive to Mr. A. when his birth day arrives ; and it will be here generally observed in the usual Stile. —

I mention this as an evidence of the proness there is among our friends to divide upon smaller points, and the difficulty there is to keep them united for want of system and discipline. in this respect the Jacobins have greatly the advantage.

. . . . . .

Wishing you as much enjoyment as

your situation and its duties will admit, I am respectfully your friend and very hum. serv.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

It is pretty plain that a thoroughly trained Federalist like Stephen Higginson must have kept his business and his politics somewhat apart. This is shown, at least, by a letter from him to Messrs. LeRoy, Bayard, and McEvers, Boston, September 12, 1799, showing that he supplied the arms for the arsenal which the State of Virginia had lately voted. John Randolph in the United States House of Representatives, nearly twenty years after, spoke of this armory as having been erected to provide the Virginians with arms in order to resist Federal encroachments. But this was expressly contradicted by Messrs. John G. Jackson and James Pleasants of Virginia in the same debate, and even the Federalists

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 801, 802.

at that day certainly did not deny the right of each State to possess its own arsenal.

Boston Sep. 12, 1799

Mess LeRoy Bayard
and McEvers—

Sirs

We have received your letter of 5th instant, and note that the arms recd. by the Prosper were on board a vessel for Richmond and that you had paid the freight of them from Hamburg $498.33. but we hope that you will get information from Richmond before they go from you, whether they will be received, for the reasons assigned in our last. if any objection is made to the quality &c we had rather have the arms with you than in Richmond. indeed there will be less danger of objections when they know they are retained to hear how the parcel from Baltimore is received and approved.

We have insured the arms here from

the port of entry to Richmond in whatever vessel they may go, as we are to deliver them there free of risk or expense at contract price.

. . . . . .

Your hum Ser

STEPHEN HIGGINSON[1]

It would appear from the following letter that the supply of arms from Europe proved unsatisfactory, not being in accordance with the sample, and it was suggested as being desirable to offer them to Toussaint L'Ouverture as shown in the following letter, to Timothy Pickering:—

BOSTON Sept. 20″ 99

DR SIR:

I received your letter of the 12th instant and have reflected upon the subject; and I think that, with the aid of the Herald, and the permission of the Secretary of the

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 824.

navy, I can arrange to furnish Touissaint with some arms, lead and flints. — I have a consignment of 4000 stands from Europe intended for the state of Virginia on Contract, according to a sample in the hands of the Executive. a part of them have been delivered at Richmond, 1320 Arms and 1536 Cartridge Boxes, which do not prove so well finished as the sample and are rejected, though confessedly very good and from one of the best factories in Prussia. the rest are on board the Acteon for new York, carried into England for inquiry, and may daily be expected at new York if not already there.

Now I propose to take a small Brigt, to go out with the Herald as a Store Ship, to put on board some Bread &c which will be wanted by our Ships on the Hispaniola Station — to order round from new York the 2680 arms by the Acteon, to put part on board the Herald and part in the Brigt, taking some of the Herald's Stores in the

Brigt to leave room and to have the Brigt balasted with Lead which may be done without clearing it out; and in case the Acteon does not arrive in time to send the Arms here in time, the Herald and Brig[t] may call off new York, and receive the Arms if they are there or if not go on to Hampton Roads where the other parcel may be ready to take in — or both parcels may be shipped in this way, if the Acteon be arrived as the Arms at Richmond will be ordered here, and probably those by the Acteon too. I can easily arrange so as to have one, if not both parcels shipped without any delay, should those by the Acteon not arrive at N. York in time to come here before the Herald will be ready, say 20 days hence. This kind of use of the Herald is necessary to cover the shipment as well as to convey the Articles safe to port; and by this arrangement we can effect the shipment without militating with the Laws. I must assume the appearance of doing this

with the privity of the government and for their use; but it will not implicate the Executive in any branch or degree, or require any direction or Act from any one to execute. But I cannot venture to do this without an understanding with Mr. Stoddert.[1] it is a use to be made of a public Ship, which as an agent I ought not to attempt without such an understanding, which may be conveyed satisfactorily to me through you, if it be thought eligible.

As yet no other safe and easy mode has occurred to me of effecting the Object; which is desirable and important in a public view; but for all I at present see, this mode may be adopted without involving any serious difficulty, it will indeed pass off without notice if well executed. But to attempt to smuggle the Articles and be detected would occasion much noise and discussion and it would render the supply very precarious without convoy and hasard

[1] Secretary of the Navy.

much more clamour, than can possibly be excited in the proposed mode — in that indeed I cannot see how any can arise, nor even a suspicion as to the Object till after it shall be effected. —[1]

It appears that some correspondence on the subject passed between him and Mr. Timothy Pickering, as is shown by the following letter:—

Boston Oct. 3^{d} 99.

D Sir

I received your several Letters of last month. your Opinion as to sending Arms &c to Hisp^{a} in the mode I suggested coincides with my own. upon reflection many objections occurred to render it ineligible, though to furnish Touissant with the means to suppress Rigaut, appears evidently for the interest of our Country. I therefore have made no preparatory Arrangements

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 825.

for the object, and have given over all thoughts of doing anything myself in the business. — [1]

He appears to have taken, personally, no more steps, though in a later letter he suggests to his New York correspondents a modified plan which they might, if they pleased, carry out. But nothing more came of it.

His tendency to conciliation evidently grew, as is so apt to be the case, with advancing years and undoubtedly led him on dangerous ground upon the occasion of the visit of the French diplomatist, Pierre Adet, to Boston in 1797. Adet became minister to the United States from France in 1795, but two years later broke off diplomatic relations under cover of a note of the Directory, declaring that France would treat neutrals as they allowed themselves to be treated by the English. While this

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 827.

matter was pending, he came to Boston and a reception was given to him, which was so strikingly characteristic of the period in its innocent inflation that it is worth recording in full. The most ample description of it is to be found in the "Columbian Centinel."

The fullest description of the event is as follows: —

A dinner was yesterday given by a number of the most respectable citizens, to his Excellency Citizen ADET, French Minister, near the *United States*. — At which were drank the following

TOASTS:

1. The President.

2. The Republic of France — The energy of her councils — The liberality of her policy, and the unparalelled splendor of her arms.

3. The Vice-President and Congress of the United States.

4. The Governor and Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

5. The Minister of France near the United States.

[The Minister here took occasion to make the following pathetic address to the Company: "The marks of friendship with which you overwhelm me, I receive, not so much on my own account, as on that of the nation I have the honor of representing — Whilst I testify at this moment the extreme satisfaction I feel in finding myself beside those citizens who first raised the standard of liberty on this Continent,[1] and who have known so well how to defend it — I seize the same instant to assure you of the affection I bear to the Republic of the United States, being assured that the Americans will exert every effort to cement with the

[1] [Being near Gov. Adams and Gen. Lincoln.]

people of France an union, formed under the auspices of victory, and which the blessings of liberty will from day to day consolidate.]

6. The Batavian Republic — May the United voice of her citizens soon give stability to her government and perpetuity to her liberties.

7. Uninterrupted Peace and Friendship between the three great Republics.

8. The Powers *friendly* to the United States.

9. The Columbsan [*sic*] Fair.

10. Our University and all sources of information.

11. The liberty of the press and the sacred right oi [*sic*] private opinion.

12. Commerce — May that of the United States be as extensive as inreresting [*sic*].

13. Agriculture — That source of independence and palladium of freedom.

14. The Arts and Sciences — Those luminaries of national glory — May they

be constantly adding new splendor to the western constellation.

15. The Temple of Freedom — May its Portals be the Poles, its Canopy the Heavens and its Votaries Mankind.

16. The Nations of the Globe — May their enlightened policy, unclouded wisdom and unsullied justice, give Peace, Liberty and Happiness to all the world.

VOLUNTEERS

The American, French, and Batavian Republics — May they, by the virtues which they practise, and the happiness which they exhibit, attach all nations to the cause of social Liberty — Liberty — May the mirror of Truth be her Ægis, and the Hydra of false Politics her Medusa's head — May the Buckler of Freedom cover the oppressed, and her spear be emblazoned in humbling the oppressor — Peace to the contending nations of the earth — May the flames of War serve but

to light the calumet of Peace. — All Mankind — May the exalted virtue of Patriotism itself be finally lost in universal Philanthropy.[1]

"It is curious," says a correspondent of this same newspaper, a week later, "but not very extraordinary to observe an evident chagrin discoverable in the disorganizers at the very cordial reception which the French Minister every where meets with since his arrival in Massachusetts. It is a happy circumstance that this gentleman's character is such a contrast to *some others*, that we Americans can testify that cordial regard and steady friendship which is universally felt in *New-England* towards the French and their cause without running into that excess of fermentation which from its very nature is short and transient. The friendship of the New-Englanders for our

[1] *Columbian Centinel*, Sept. 24, 1796.

illustrious allies is like that of our great WASHINGTON, calm, sober, and lasting, and not enthusiastic, flaming, and evanescent. The *New-England* character is that of blunt sincerity, mixed with that honest pride, which disdains to express in words or actions, what our hearts do not feel, and sober reason confirm. — It must be gratifying to our very respectable visitant to know that all *New-England* can shout with sincerity *vive la Republique Francais.*"[1]

On another page of the same paper is a Protest signed "A Federalist" against "the evident disrespect paid to the Proclamation of neutrality issued by our President, in the address of the Selectmen to Citizen Adet."

But this gave clear room to the keen pen of John Quincy Adams, who seldom missed an opportunity of making himself even with a critic and who writes as fol-

[1] *Columbian Centinel*, Oct. 1, 1796.

lows: "Pray tell me *entre nous*, whether you were one of the citizens who fraternized with Citizen Adet at Concert Hall? Whether Citizen Lincoln and Citizen Higginson were not a little in the compunctions for the illegitimate embraces they gave and received on that day? They seemed to me to be stolen amours at the time. We may smile a little *sub rosâ* at these runnings astray after stolen waters of our good friends, and meritorious characters. But it is a serious thing."[1]

To the reader of the present time, this may seem mainly important as indicating a tone of rhetorical breadth which has now quite ceased to be palatable. It was much better characterized by Fisher Ames as follows:—

"You will see the toasts at a feast of fraternity in Boston for M. Adet; there is

[1] President Adams to John Quincy, Feb. 21, 1797, in E. Quincy's *Life of J. Quincy*, p. 54.

an incorrectness in them and in the whole business; some good men incautiously yielded to the project which the antis set on foot, but could not execute even decently, unless their betters in character and principle, should concur. A second set followed the first, who were entrapped because they would not leave them to be mortified. This may palliate it to you and a few others, but the face of the business is bad and foolish at home and abroad."[1]

Stephen Higginson was brought in contact with John Quincy Adams some years later in a manner which may or may not have healed the wound left by the Adet reception, but which does not appear to have left more harmonious results. In Mr. Adams's Diary, he tells of being called upon in the State Senate in February, 1803, by Harrison Gray Otis, with a project of a new bank in Boston. Otis stated that

[1] Gibbs's *Administrations of Washington and Adams*, ii, 384.

"about twenty gentlemen had met together and projecting to unite all the great and respectable interests in the town had chosen a committee from among themselves to offer the subscriptions round to every gentleman of respectable character," no person except the original proprietors being allowed to take over fifty shares. Mr. Adams wished for a more general subscription to which Mr. Otis strongly objected. Later Mr. Higginson, Mr. Lyman, and Mr. Lloyd also came to him in the afternoon on the same matter. Adams, having stated his objections, found it, in his own words, a "subject of no small difficulty how to conduct myself on this occasion."[1] There was a close vote on the bill in the State Senate, 14 to 12, and it passed in the House, but was reconsidered, and appears to have fallen through. We can hardly appreciate the position held by the few banks in the community without

[1] *Memoirs* of John Quincy Adams, i, 261.

recalling the curious fact that at Harvard Commencement exercises during the eighteenth century the four persons regularly seated in state upon the platform were the Governor of the State, the President of the State Senate, the Speaker of the House, and "the President of the Bank."[1]

One of the latest of Stephen Higginson's letters now accessible is to be found among the manuscript Pickering papers of the Massachusetts Historical Society (vol. xxvii, p. 57), relating to a difference of opinion between Pickering and John Quincy Adams, then senator from Massachusetts, on the subject of Louisiana. Letters of Dana and Ames on the same subject are to be found in the same volume. The letter of Stephen Higginson is as follows, and furnishes one of the most piquant exhibitions of the view of John Quincy Adams which seems to have been taken by many at that period.

[1] Knox's *History of Banking* (N. Y. 1900), p. 359.

Boston, Feb^{y} 15th 1804.

D Sir

I received your letters of Jan^{y} 6 to 16th, which I have been prevented from answering sooner by sickness. —

I have shewn your Letter to Mess^{rs} Cabot, Ames, T: Parsons, Judge Dana, and a number of your friends beside, who agree in Opinion, that you have been correct in Sentiment and conduct, and that your Colleague has acted like himself. I inclose you a note from Dana and another from Ames, which will give you a just view of the Opinions of your friends on the subject of your Letter —

Mr. A: will continue to be, as was expected, very erratic in his Opinions and movements. like a Kite without a Tail, he will be violent and constant in his attempts to rise ; but like that, he will be impelled by every eddy Wind, and will pitch on one side and on the other, as the popular Currents may happen to strike,

without soaring to his intended point. his views are ambitious, even to the Chair of State ; but his conflicting passions will lead him astray, and prevent his rising. he looks constantly to the object of his wishes ; but his pride and vanity never permit him to use steadily the means necessary to attain the end. his dispositions feelings and habits are those of a very high toned Aristocrat; but, in the present state of things, he must rise by the democratic Ladder, or not make any progress in his pursuit. — with such Views and feelings &c, it is very natural for him at one time to court the Virginia democrats, to endeavour to concilitate his virtuous brethren of Louisiana; and at another to seperate from, and perhaps affront both. to shew his independence he will beside be often misled by his visionary scheme of building up a third and independent party, to controul both the federalists and democrats, both of which he affects to believe

are equally wrong. with this strange mixture of passion, and visionary schemes, unchecked by common sense, and practical discretion derived from experience and a knowledge of the world, you must not expect a steady coincidence of opinion, and union as to the object and manner of pursuit, although you may appear to agree in your leading principles of Action. —

. . . . . .

Wishing as much health and satisfaction as your present situation will admit of, I am very truly yours &c.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

Another enterprise in which Stephen Higginson was involved at this time was one of the very first experiments at banking in Massachusetts. The early history of banking in these enterprises is now ad-

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 839, 840, 841.

mitted by the most patient students to be almost impenetrable. It is known that the Massachusetts Bank chartered in Boston in 1784 was the first local bank in that State and the second in the United States, the Bank of Philadelphia having been chartered January 7, 1784. There were indeed but five banks in the whole nation up to 1799, and in 1805 there were but sixteen. It seems that in 1803, a law requiring semi-annual returns of conditions to the Governor and Council was enacted. No systematic effort to collect statistics on banks was imposed until 1832 and no definite information concerning them seems now accessible.

Secretary Crawford in 1836 admitted that at that time many of the amounts given in this direction were wholly conjectural. Mr. Gouge, in his short history of paper money and banking in the United States, says that all efforts to collect the accounts of the early banks had proved so

unsatisfactory that it was "not thought worth while to arrange for publication the materials that had been procured."[1] After 1799 no bank but that at Nantucket could issue notes of less than five dollars, this exception being perhaps on account of the whale fishery. As a result the State was flooded with small bills from other States; this again bringing such inconvenience in Massachusetts that bank-bills for twenty-five cents were used everywhere and specie almost disappeared. It is hardly strange if it is now impossible to determine the fate of a bank projected by Stephen Higginson and his fellow capitalists.

It is in a similar way a great source of regret that so few of Stephen Higginson's letters to Alexander Hamilton appear in the collections. It is known that Hamilton's son came to Boston, when engaged in the preparation of his memoir of his

[1] See Knox's *History of Banking* (N. Y. 1900), p. 307.

father, and was quite vexed, it is recorded, at finding that his letters to Higginson had been burned by the latter, in pursuit of a practice which extended also to George Cabot, Jonathan Jackson, and others; and the few letters of Higginson's to Hamilton which are preserved are far less valuable and significant, as a whole, than those addressed to others.

XII

NAVY AGENT

(1798)

" Far as the breeze can bear, the billows roam,
Survey our empire and behold our home! "

Byron, *The Corsair*, I, 1.

NAVY AGENT

It is not too much to claim that Stephen Higginson stood for many years at or near the head of those Boston merchants, the weight of whose judgment was fully recognized by the general government, at a time when mercantile relations occupied far more of national functions than now. Private letters are extant affording stronger testimony of this influence than is to be found in any mere rumor, as, for instance, in this letter from John Jay to President Washington: —

New York, 26 January, 1796.

Dear Sir,

The British ratification of the treaty not having arrived, and consequently the time for appointing the Commissioners mentioned in it not being come, I have

thus long postponed replying to yours of the 21st of last month. It certainly is important that the Commissioners relative to the debts, and also the captures, be men the best qualified for those places. Probably it would be advisable to appoint one lawyer and one merchant for each of them. The capture cases are to be decided in London. From much that I have heard, and the little I have observed of Mr. Higginson, of Boston, I am induced to think him, as a merchant, the best qualified of any I am acquainted with; and the mass of the captures being from the Eastern and Middle States, it would perhaps be most satisfactory that the Commissioners should be from those countries. With him I should be inclined to join Mr. King, or Mr. Dexter, or perhaps Mr. Smith of South Carolina.[1]

It was only natural that under these

[1] Sparks's *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, iv, 479.

circumstances the government should look toward Stephen Higginson, after his years of nautical life, for active participation in creating an American navy. How great was the opposition brought out by the first efforts in this direction will be best indicated by the following extract from a speech of William Maclay, who with Robert Morris represented Pennsylvania in the first United States Senate: "It is the design of the Court party [referring to those who wished the new government to conform as much as possible to the monarchical ideas of the Old World] to have a fleet and an army. This is but the entering wedge of a new monarchy in America, after all the bloodshed and sufferings of a seven years' war to establish a republic. The Indian War is forced forward to justify our having a standing army, and eleven unfortunate men now in slavery in Algiers is the pretext for fitting out a fleet." In another

place he says: "This thing of a fleet has been working among our members all the session. I have heard it break out often. It is another menace to our republican institutions."[1]

The author of "Familiar Letters on Public Characters," William Sullivan, a man of great ability and integrity, but a bitter Federalist, says of Stephen Higginson, "He was navy agent of the United States from the first beginning of the navy until he was dismissed to accommodate one of Mr. Jefferson's partisans." It is fair to say at this point that Mr. Sullivan here goes quite too far and is unjust, not merely to President Jefferson, but more particularly to the newly appointed Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert. The case was a very simple one. The first Secretary of the Navy appointed was George Cabot. He declined the office, however, under

[1] William Maclay's *Journal*, p. 383.

[2] Sullivan's *Familiar Letters*, p. 381.

circumstances stated in the following correspondence, when the very existence of the new-born Navy Department was at stake. The position will be best understood by reading the following letters which passed between Pickering and Cabot: —

PICKERING TO CABOT

Department of State, May 5, 1798.

Sir, — The President of the United States being desirous of availing the public of your services as Secretary of the Navy of the United States, I have now the honor of enclosing the commission, and of expressing the sentiments of respect with which I am, sir, your obedient servant,

Timothy Pickering.

Then follows a private letter accompanying the official one. It begins as follows: —

SIR, — I cannot transmit your commission, without expressing my individual wishes that you would accept the office of Secretary of the Navy of the United States. I know at the same time that you cannot accept it without making some sacrifices ; but our present situation demands this as a duty from every citizen, and especially from those who are eminently qualified to contribute to the safety and prosperity of our country. In this new office, the President wishes to find not only a person of practical knowledge in maritime affairs, but a statesman ; and how seldom can these two characters be found combined in one person? In every character, public and private, you know how happy those of us whom you are already acquainted with would be made by your acceptance of the office. The public advantages to be derived from your conducting the department you can fully estimate, and your friends have anticipated. Although the

formation of a navy has been contemplated these four years, it is at the present moment only that the establishment may be considered as commencing, and it is of vast importance that the foundation be well laid,—that the first institutions and regulations be adjusted in the best manner to its present most efficient use and future prospering. I will suggest but one other consideration. If you decline taking the office, where will your country find a substitute? There is not one in Philadelphia, and you will readily believe there is no one southward of it; and, if you fix your eye on anyone to the eastward, will you propose to yourself these questions; "Can he relinquish his private affairs more conveniently than I? Can he accept the office without making greater sacrifices than I must make? In a word, is it the duty of any citizen more than mine to perform this indispensable public service?"[1]

[1] Lodge's *Life of Cabot*, p. 155.

The following is Cabot's answer: —

CABOT TO PICKERING

Brookline, May 11, 1798.

My dear Sir, — By the same mail which brought me your official letter of the 5th, I received a private one to which I feel anxious to make a satisfactory reply. Although it is true that my inclinations, habits, duties, and interests all remarkably concur in confining me to private life, and although in consequence of this I have been continually growing less fit for any public station where great efficiency is required, yet such is my zeal to maintain the political institutions of our country, and thus preserve the country itself, that I should not at this moment hesitate to engage in the office to which I am invited, if I were not perfectly convinced that the service is beyond my strength.

I have seen with a painful sympathy, the tasks which our executive officers are

GEORGE CABOT

called to perform, and have often made the reflection that, if they were not capable of the most intense and persevering application, the public business must suffer. I have seen with pride, however, that the affairs of our executive government have been conducted with a degree of order, intelligence, and steadiness that do great honor to the nation; but I must be allowed to say that I am incapable of imitating those efforts which in others have been productive of so much good. This is a circumstance so important that, in my estimation, it greatly outweighs the advantage of any practical knowledge which a person could be supposed to bring into the office. It is undoubtedly requisite that the officer at the head of the naval department should possess considerable knowledge of maritime affairs; but this should be elementary as well as practical, including the principles of naval architecture and naval tactics. He should also possess

skill sufficient to arrange systematically the means of equipping, manning, and conducting the naval force with the greatest possible despatch and with the least possible expense; and, above all, he should possess the inestimable secret of rendering it invincible by any equal force. Thus a knowledge of the human heart will constitute an essential ingredient in the character of this officer, that he may be able to convert every incident to the elevation of the spirit of American seamen. Suffer me to ask how a man who has led a life of indolence for twenty years can be rendered capable of these various exertions? In the present case, it is physically impossible. Notwithstanding the grateful sensations which are excited by so flattering a testimony of the national confidence, yet I think I do not deceive myself in saying that I had rather not have been thought fit for this office, than be justly chargeable with refusing at this time any essential

service which I ought to perform. Let me therefore repeat that, waiving all other objections, *it is an insuperable one* that my powers are inadequate to the work.[1]

Cabot being thus out of the question, the active work of the navy during the interval between Cabot's refusal and the appointment of a permanent secretary lay in the hands of one who, far from leading a life of indolence for twenty years, had led a very busy life, namely, Stephen Higginson. The interval lasted from May 11 to June 22, 1798, the latter being the date when the first actual Secretary of the Navy entered on his duties, though Stephen Higginson wrote on June 9 to Timothy Pickering:[2] "I am glad to learn that Mr. Stoddert has accepted the office of Sec'y of the Navy; and I hope he will soon

[1] Lodge's *Life of Cabot*, p. 156. See the fine tribute to Cabot by Dr. Channing, in his address entitled "The Union."

[2] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 808.

enter upon his duties, which are important indeed."

I have in my possession copies of a hundred or more letters from the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Stoddert, to Stephen Higginson, these being accompanied, strange to say, by only two from the latter, who was yet the man in whom the new Secretary of the Navy evidently placed his entire confidence during his early experience. This is clearly shown by the whole tone of the new Secretary's earlier letters. He writes, for instance, in the very first of these (June 22, 1798), from the Navy Department the following: "I am but new to my office & shall stand in need of all the aid I can obtain from enlightened and patriotic men like yourself in all parts of the Union, to enable me to discharge with success its arduous duties."[1] In the next letter the Secretary writes further (June 30, 1798): "The officers, agreeably to the

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

list enclosed in your letter of the 25th inst., have been this day presented to the President, who has nominated to the Senate the commissioned officers, and has appointed the others. There is no doubt all will be appointed, and as soon as they are appointed, commissions shall be forwarded."[1] Nearly a week later (July 5) after inquiring for the exact situation of the frigate Constitution, he writes: —

"Presuming that men can be immediately had for the Herald, I will in two or three days send Capt. Sever's instructions for a cruise. Our coast, at least from New York to Cape Henry, has been, for some time past, clear of French Privateers. From Cape Henry to the Southern Extremity will be sufficiently guarded for the present. Capt. Sever & the cutter, I presume, will be equal to the protection of the Eastern Coasts and the fisheries, and the three frigates, two of which are

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

out, might do something in the West Indies. I wish I had your full advice and opinion on this subject. I shall always receive with satisfaction your ideas as to the proper employment of our vessels." [1]

Letters like the following show how large a portion of the actual work of organizing this new navy devolved on the business agents, and also shows more fully the complete dependence placed for a time on Stephen Higginson.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
30th June, 1798.

SIR:

The officers [of a certain ship], agreeably to the list enclosed in your letter of the 25th inst., have been this day presented to the President, who has nominated to the Senate the commissioned officers, and has appointed the others. There is no doubt all will be appointed, and as soon as they

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

are appointed commissions shall be forwarded.

With respect to the other officers, it is not probable their names will be rec'd. in time enough to have their commissions sent on to Boston before the Herald is ready for a cruise. In this case, Capt. Sever, with your aid, must fill up the different stations with proper characters. There can be no question that the appointments will be approved of here, and the officers can make one cruise, as those of Capt. Truxton's have done, without warrants or commissions. A list of the names and station of the officers must be forwarded to me, with the dates of their appointments, that I may have them approved of by the President and registered in this office.

The Lieutenant of Marines and Surgeon's Mate, being commissioned officers, they must be appointed by the Senate, if in session. Blank commissions, therefore,

could not be sent on for them, nor is it the practice to send them for warrant officers.

Your idea of making the Pilot the sailing master is certainly a good one, and will be attended to, but proper pilots cannot be found in all places for sailing masters. In Boston such persons can be found. Capt. Decatur has a pilot who is the sailing master — his pay is 60 dollars per month. It is presumed the person acting in this capacity with Capt. Sever will be content with the same pay.

I shall, in a few days, send on to Capt. Sever his orders for a cruise. It is hoped he will be ready.

Copper for the ships at Portsmouth is ordered to be sent immediately.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON, Esq., BOSTON.[1]

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
5th July, 1798.

. . . . . .

I wish I knew the exact situation of the

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

Frigate Constitution. You have judged right in procuring everything for the ship building at Portsmouth which could be got with you, instead of depending on Philadelphia. This line of conduct will be right in all future instances. The freight, delay, etc., will always make up for more than any difference in price, even if the articles could be procured cheaper here, which is doubted. The copper has been ordered on, and the ballast shall be sent in time. Your suggestions as to an understanding with the British shall be attended to.

Presuming that men can be immediately had for the Herald, I will in two or three days send on Capt. Sever's instructions for a cruise. Our coast, at least from New York to Cape Henry, has been, for some time past, clear of French privateers. From Cape Henry to the Southern Extremity will be sufficiently guarded for the present. Capt. Sever & the cutter, I

presume, will be equal to the protection of the Eastern Coasts and the fisheries, and the three frigates, two of which are out, might do something in the West Indies. I wish I had your full advice and opinion on this subject. I shall always receive with satisfaction your ideas as to the proper employment of our vessels. The force we shall be able to command in one month will be as follows: —

Frigate U. States . . . . . 48 guns.
Constellation . . . . . 38 "
Constitution . . . . . 44 "
Two ships from Baltimore, 20 guns each.
Two from this port, now out, the same force.
Two or three cutters.
The Herald.

Your letter does not state the sum wanted for fitting out the Herald. Expecting to hear shortly from you on this subject, I have requested the Secretary of the Treasury to remit you by this day's mail 8000

dollars on that account, and a further sum of 4000 dollars, to be paid over by you to Capt. Sever, for the purpose of recruiting the men. If there was a purser appointed he would be the proper person to receive and distribute it to the recruiting officers, under the direction of the Captain. Be so good as to have a proper person fixed on for this office, and let him act as if he had received his appointment, sending his name to me, and if more money be necessary, be pleased to have it furnished.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON, Esq.[1]

This illustrates the need of counsel felt by the newly appointed head of the Navy Department: —

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
July 12, 1798.

SIR: I have this day sent on orders to Captain Nicholson & Capt. Sever to proceed to sea.

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

The cutter at Newbury is to be under my direction when equipped for sea. I enclose orders for the Captain, which I presume the Secretary of the Treasury has ordered him to obey. I can say to you, in confidence, that Barry, in the Frigate United States, 48 guns, that Decatur, in the Delaware, a strong ship of 22 guns, have orders to proceed immediately from the Capes of Delaware and to fall in with Capt. Sever and the cutter at Cape Cod, or, not finding them there, to Nantasket Roads; from whence the four vessels are to proceed, under the command of Barry, to the West Indies, to fall in with the Islands, 3 or 4 degrees to the windward of Barbadoes, and thence keeping to the windward of Martinico, Antigua, etc., to Porto Rico, from whence, after a short cruise, and attempting to get our seamen from that Island, where it is said there are a great many, they are to return. Captain Nicholson meantime is to protect the

Eastern Coast—his cruising ground from about fifteen leagues East of the east end of George's Island to the west of Long Island.

I wish you would give me your candid opinion of this arrangement, and add such observations as shall direct me better in future. It was unfortunate that, in conferring the appointment of the Secretary of the Navy upon me, the President could not also confer the knowledge necessary for the Secretary of the Navy to possess to make him most useful to his country.[1]

At this point in the correspondence come the two letters from Stephen Higginson, himself, preserved out of all this correspondence. How the disappearance of all these other letters occurred will probably never be known. It has aready been mentioned that Stephen Higginson burnt much of his correspondence, like

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

many Federalists, after the party went hopelessly out of power. But inasmuch as these letters of his own must have been in the custody of the Navy Department, it is impossible to tell how they were recalled and what became of them. For this reason both letters are given as follows: these being in all probability only the representative of a hundred or so which have disappeared.

BOSTON, July 25, '98.

SIR:

Capt. Sever this moment mentions that you had intimated to him that you could nowhere find the force of the *Herald* stated. This I wonder at, as I had mentioned in more than one letter that she was to carry 16 six pounders and six four-pounders on quarter decks and forecastle, and Capt. Sever has arranged to take 54 able seamen, 26 ordinary, sergeant, corporal, two musicians and 14 marines, which, with the commissioned and war-

rant officers, will make 128 in all. I seize the moment of the post going off to state this to you & remain

Respectfully, your hum. sevt.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

Here follows naturally the only other letter from Stephen Higginson on this point which has come to light at Washington, and I give it in full to convey his idea of the duties of his position and also his fearless and independent judgment of his subordinates : —

BOSTON, August 23, 1798.

BENJ. STODDERT, Esq.

SIR:

I remain without any letters from you since my last. Yesterday the *Herald* and *Pickering* sailed on their cruise, after waiting several days for a wind, with several other vessels. Capt. Sever has left

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

with me the pay roll, muster roll, watch list and quarter bill, and a number of persons' oaths, &c., which I shall forward to you, if they are to be in your office, as I suppose.

I mentioned in my last Capt. Sever not having all his marines, and sent you a copy of my note to him to remove his doubts about going to sea without them, which had its effect. Sever will be an excellent naval commander ; he is a cool, firm, discreet, gentlemanlike man, who feels and conducts with dignity & zeal proper to his station; he is remarkable for discipline and regularity; his principle defect, if it may be called one, is a great attention to method & order ; and his first Lt. is a fine fellow, possessing every quality requisite to excel in the naval line. You may be assured that ship is well appointed, & will not be given away to any vessel near her force.

The Cutter is also well appointed, with

good officers & a good crew. Capt. Chapman is not inferior to any man in the Navy; many think him to excel, & his officers are very good.

As Capt. Sever appointed & attended upon the frigate at Portsmouth till she was suspended, he expects again to be called to attend upon her, no doubt, & at his return from this cruise will be ready to do it; & Capt. Chapman will be the man most agreeable to the subscribers & the committee for building the ship in this town, & would himself like to have her.

I will suggest to you an arrangement which I think will be very agreeable to the people of influence & discernment here, & will be promotive of the public interest. If Capts. Sever & Chapman shall be appointed to the ships mentioned, they will prefer leaving their present commands & attending to the building their new ships, as they will wish to oversee and direct in many matters of interior construction, to

conform to their own taste. Mr. Hutchins, now first Lt. of the *Herald*, can take the *Herald*, which he merits fully, and Mr. Hillar first Lt. of the *Pickering*, can be rewarded by the command of her. These two men are very efficient & have great talents for the Navy. Hutchins is an uncommon man and both are capable of greater energies than common men, and both have great spirit and ambition, tempered with discretion. This will leave the ship building by Col. Hacket, at Portsmouth, for Daniel McNeil, who, I find, has his eye upon and wishes to be appointed to her. I take the liberty of suggesting this arrangement as one which will meet the desires of the officers, the public opinion & the good of the service ; and if it does not interfere with any other which you may have in view, I think I might venture to be responsible for the result. The only part that I have any doubt is that of McNeils, but as he is

to be provided for and has a commission, he had better have that ship than one here.

I thought the 20,000 dollars remitted last would have been sufficient for all demands this month, but I find the *Herald's* bills amount to more than I expected, and more is called for from Portsmouth, so that another 20,000 dollars will be wanted. The accounts for the *Herald* will be all in and ready next week to forward to you. Will you have all the original bills sent on; duplicates have been taken of most & may be forwarded if you wish them.

I am with respect your hum. sevt.,

STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

The following is also interesting as showing the view then held as to the ultimate needs of the Navy, and how candidly the new secretary sought counsel of one who was technically an agent only : —

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
10th April, 1799.

SIR :

It is not positively determined at what places the six 74 gun ships are to be built. Steps have been taken to get from Georgia the frames of live oak, but a very great quantity of other timber will be wanted and must be obtained very quickly. Moulds are preparing and by the time they are ready to be sent from hence, I want to fix on the places to which they are to be sent.

I am inclined to believe that we must ultimately build our public ships at not more than three different places — one in New Hampshire or Massachusetts, one on North River, and one on Chesapeake Bay, but I am rather disposed to build the present six ships in as many different places, but to make collections of timber, beyond what will be necessary for the ships, only at three places; one on Chesapeake, one

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THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION

on North River, and one to the Eastward. Will you be so good as to favor me with your opinion on this subject, and also with your opinion of the places where two of the present six ships ought to set up east of New York. One will probably be commenced at New York, one on Delaware. But if it should be found impracticable to build one on Delaware, for want of sufficient depth of water, a point at this moment doubtful. In that case, three will be set up Eastward of New York.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON, Esq.[1]

Such letters as those of Stoddert could easily be multiplied, but a hundred of them would only establish more thoroughly the fact that he, the first actual Secretary of the Navy, was a trustworthy and laborious man; and also the other fact that Stephen Higginson was both the coadjutor and the guiding adviser in all this work,

[1] U. S. Navy Department MSS.

in which consisted the actual creation of the American Navy, and of which the frigate Constitution now remains the sole memorial.

XIII

THE FEASTS OF SHELLS
(1802–3–4)

"There take (says Justice), take ye each a shell!" — Pope, from *Boileau* (*Epître* ii).

THE FEASTS OF SHELLS

THERE are few things which throw a light more curious and unexpected on the habits of our New England ancestors than the annual celebration, under the above name, both in Plymouth and in Boston, of that which was also called, more reverentially, Forefathers Day. It was apparently in the year 1769 that the Old Colony Club began to celebrate this event by a public dinner, at which they made a great point of serving shell-fish, succotash, and the like. The following description of one of these early feasts in Plymouth is taken from the account of the celebration as given in the "Boston Gazette," January 22, 1770: —

"At eleven of the clock, A. M., the members of the club met met [*sic*] at the hall, and from thence proceeded to the

house of Mr. Howland, which is erected upon the spot where the first licenced house in the Old Colony formerly stood: At half after Two, a decent repast was served up, consisting of a large baked Whortle-berry Pudding, Sauqetash, Cod-fish, Clams, Oysters, a Haunch of Vennison, (roasted by the first jack brought to the Colony,) Sea-Fowl, Frost: Fish and Eels, dress'd in the plainest manner; all appearance of luxury and extravagance being avoided, in imitation of their worthy ancestors, at four o'clock P. M. the members of the Club headed by the steward, carrying a folio volume of the laws of the old Colony, hand in hand walk'd in procession to the Hall: Upon the appearance of the members in the front of the Hall a number of the descendants from the first settlers of the old Colony, drew up in a regular file and discharged a volley of small arms, succeeded by three cheers, which were returned by the Club; after this at

the private Grammar School opposite the hall, a number of young gentlemen [assembled] to express their joy upon the occasion, and their respect for the memory of their ancestors, in the most agreeable manner join'd in singing a song very suitable for the day. At sun sett a Cannon wos [*sic*] fired and the Flag struck; in the evening the Hall was illuminated and a number of the principal Gentlemen of the Town being previously invited joined the Club and the President (being seated in a large and venerable Chair formerly possessed by WILLIAM BRADFORD the second worthy Governor of the Old Colony and presented to the Club by Dr. LeBarron of that Town) delivered the following toasts, and a number of others, which were drank by the Company.

. . . . . .

"After spending the Evening in an agreeable manner in recapitulating, and conversing upon the many and various

adventures of their forefathers in the first settlement of this Country, and the growth and increase of the same, at Eleven o'Clock in the Evening a Cannon was again fired, three cheers given, and the Company withdrew."

These Plymouth celebrations continued apparently up to the year 1781. During the first ten years of this period there were also religious exercises, though none earlier. From 1781 to 1792, there was apparently no celebration at Plymouth, since which such exercises have always been held. In Boston, they were imitated, for the first time, in 1797 or 1798 and were thence followed for many years. In 1801, 1802, and 1803 Stephen Higginson presided at the Boston festivals, his vice-presidents being on the first occasion Joseph Russell, Peleg Coffin, and Martin Brimmer. It appears from the "Columbian Centinel," December 25, 1802, that the hall was appropriately ornamented with the portraits of Win-

throp, Endicott, Leverett, Higginson, Bradstreet, and Wilson, together with an historical painting "the Landing of the Fathers" from the pencil of Mr. Sargent and many curiosities connected with the manners and persons of the time. It appears that there were seventeen regular toasts and fourteen volunteer ones, one being to the President of the Day [Stephen Higginson] after he had retired from the chair, "May the Jacobins find many Federalists whom they dread as much and who will dread them as little."

From the fact that many toasts followed this, we may assume that in colonial feasts, as in modern ones, the entertainment grew somewhat more convivial in later hours, and a younger chairman succeeded. It was, however, at the very end of the feast, it would seem, that Judge Paine volunteered this rousing sentiment, "Great Britain, May that Nation which stood the Friend of Liberty when Liberty had no

other Friend among the Nations be refined and conformed and remain the *Jachin*[1] while the United States of America stands the *Boaz* of true Political and Social Liberty, until Sun and Moon shall set no more."

A festive occasion is imperfectly seen, however, so long as we view it only through the eyes of its supporters. Let us now turn to the Feast of Shells as described by the Democratic press of Boston.

Thus in 1802 the "Independent Chronicle" for December 30 expresses indignation at the speeches made at the "Feast of Shells" entertainment, and still more that one of them should have been introduced by the tune which was then, doubtless, in fashion, "Go to the devil and shake yourself." The editor follows it up with these words, "This is a pretty ditty for the Sons of our pious Forefathers — what an appearance must Gen. Lincoln and

[1] 2 Chronicles, iii, 17.

Judge Paine make in company with Stephen Higginson, Fisher Ames, Timothy Pickering, Dr. Parker, the Rev. Mr. John Gardiner, etc. etc. while attentively listening to the music of 'Go to the devil and shake yourself.' This is piety with a vengeance."

On the recurrence of these alleged orgies in 1803, the "Independent Chronicle" is yet more wrathful (December 26, 1803), under the following head: —

FEAST OF SHELLS — OR, *BOSTON SEDITION*

IT has become fashionable of late, for a few of the *rich* and *well-born* gentry to celebrate what *they* call "the anniversary of the landing of OUR FOREFATHERS, at *Cape Cod* or *Plymouth*." Who are they that gather themselves together on this new-fangled, glorious day, to *eat & drink* in honor of *their ancestors*, and call it a *Feast of Shells?* and what the

peculiar shining virtues of the celebrators and celebrated ?

How striking a similarity is there between the feast at VILA'S, and the scanty meal of clams, and fish, and brook water, with which the poor houseless, expatriated, discontented wanderers, were obliged to satisfy THEIR UNPAMPERED APPETITES! The virtues of those adventurers, who first landed in this part of the American empire, ought to be praised (if by their descendants they are praised at all) with great modesty. It is enough to say of them that, in their native country, they possessed, or thought they possessed, merits for which they were not sufficiently respected or rewarded — the genius of their then country was intolerant; and they flew from persecution, in order to spread the seed of persecution in an uninhabited wilderness.

Is this 22d of December, in the manner it is managed, a valuable institution ?

Will the nobility and gentry about St. James's, observe it with admiration, or derision? Is it a respectable anniversary? look at the toasts, and *they* will answer. Have the celebrators, one spark of the modest simplicity, the unassuming piety, the disinterested devotion to GOD and the Commonweal, which warmed the breasts of our ancestors? Are the celebrators poor, disinterested and pious? Do they share all things in common? Are *they* exclusively (and who of them) the descendants of our ancestors? Are not most of the celebrators bloated and overabounding with such sort of piety as filled the *breast* of Archbishop LAUD? Have not many of them been persecutors? Have they not had their share of power and good fat offices?

In the third year (on December 27, 1804) the "Independent Chronicle" recurs once more to the subject of "The

parade that is made previously to this mock sensation" (*i. e.* of the Pilgrim dinner), and describes an imaginary man falling asleep, who fancies himself to be watching a celebration where "a great number of well-fed, well-dressed Pilgrims, who had never endured penance beyond a drunken headache, were walking about with some impatience, looking at their gold watches and demanding the dinner forthwith." The writer then goes on to describe an imaginary picture in which occurs the only reference to the presiding officer, thus: "I observed that the company attempted to eat their soup at first with cockle-shells *à la Pélérin*, but his honor the moderator having spilled some fat broth on a new pair of black satin breeches, he called for spoons and the antique fashion was abandoned." A correspondent adds the expression of indignant regret that "sacred priests should mingle in the laugh of revenge, the toast

of slander and the song of personal contempt on a Saturday evening and bend with confidence over the board of devotion on the day following."

No allusions to these festive occasions are apparently to be found in Stephen Higginson's correspondence. I find in "An Appeal to the Public," by Jedediah Morse, D.D. (Charlestown, 1814), he states in regard to his "History of New England," "The proposal of making it a school book, to aid the design of the *feast of shells*, was by me mentioned to a number of the principal promoters of that festival, among others to Mr. S. H. Jun. [Higginson] and was by them approved."[1]

[1] Morse's *Appeal to the Public*, p. 67. It was through this reference that I first heard of the Feast itself.

XIV

A GREEN OLD AGE

"A green old age unconscious of decay." — Pope's *Homer's Iliad*, XXIII, 989.

A GREEN OLD AGE

Stephen Higginson was made a justice of the peace in Massachusetts in 1782 and of the Quorum in 1788. He was at one time displaced by Governor Hancock and then reappointed by Governor Bowdoin, the Laco Letters having very probably had something to do with these changes. In 1784, February 7, a bank was established in Massachusetts of which Governor Bowdoin was president and George Cabot, Jonathan Mason, John Lowell, Stephen Higginson and others were directors. The latter sustained some loss of property in 1781, and at that time became separated in partnership from Jonathan Jackson, who removed to Newburyport, but Higginson continued until about 1812 a successful merchant. His only brother Henry died unmarried about that time, leaving him a

property of five or six thousand dollars. At his most prosperous time Stephen Higginson is described as having been worth about half a million dollars, but when he left business he had only about a hundred and thirty thousand. The standard of wealth, we must remember, was incomparably lower in those days than at the present time. There lies before me the list of subscribers for the first Catholic church in Boston, that established by Father Cheverus in 1803, in which the list is headed by John Adams, the Perkins brothers, Stephen Higginson, and Stephen Higginson, Jr., each of these contributing one hundred dollars, followed by five other subscribers to the same amount, all other subscriptions reaching only lower sums. Several visits to England had made him more cautious in commercial matters than was my father, who kept up his risky enterprises until he failed altogether and had to retire from business. My grand-

father was still classed among the rich men of Boston and built what was then a large country seat in Brookline, upon ground now occupied by his kinsmen of the Lowell family; and his life there was too picturesque and old-fashioned not to be given in a separate chapter, as portrayed by my cousin the late William Henry Channing.

The following letter is from Stephen Higginson, who had declined reëlection to Congress, to Arthur Lee, who was still there, in reference to the retirement of Alexander Hamilton, "the General," from that branch of the public service. It will be remembered that one of Hamilton's favorite measures had been to obtain consent to the grant of five per cent impost on imports. This was defeated, largely through the opposition of Rhode Island; and Lodge, in his biography of Hamilton (p. 40), says: "Defeated at this point, Congress fell back on its old policy of

recommending a grant for a term of years; and against this Hamilton and Higginson voted with the Rhode Islanders, who opposed all forms of taxation or debt-paying." It would seem from this letter, however, that Stephen Higginson was by no means an ally of Hamilton in what the latter called "continental politics": —

Boston, Jan'y 27, 1784.

Dr Sir, —Yours from Annapolis I recd — the Account you give of the General's [Hamilton's] resignation agrees well with what the Papers relate — it was no doubt affecting to you who were present & the manner in which he did it may serve to increase his popularity, for the great mass of the People are governed wholly by appearances, but he would in my Opinion have rendered his Character much more perfect had he have given us in his Valedictory strong evidence that he still re-

tained his republican Ideas & principles, that he yet should be anxiously careful to preserve unimpaired the Constitut. and could never be induced by foreign or domestic Influence to aid those measures that have the most remote tendency to subvert that Government which he once affected to revere & for the support of which he has repeatedly declared he was ready to hazard his All — I confess that it is to me mysterious how a man who has any knowledge of Our national affairs & is in any degree acquainted with the Characters of those in the great Departments & of Congress, can be highly in favour of the 5 pr. ct. Impost and for increasing the Powers of Congress, & at the same time heartily attached to Our present Constitution — Can any man take a View of the Doings of Congress for the last three years & believe that an increase of their Power would conduce to the public Happiness or tend to preserve our present form of Gov-

ernment ? Does not the present Congress in a great degree consist of the same men whose public Conduct will surely be ever memorable, does not the same Junto, the same Influence still guide the measures of Congress that laid the most important Interests, nay the very Independence, of this Country at the feet of the french ministry? & while this is the Case must not an increase of their power in the same degree increase the danger of Our being yet brought into Bondage? surely it must — Who will believe that an Impost which from its very nature will give room for ambitious & designing ministers to misapply it, nay to employ it to seduce even Congress itself or some of its members, when he knows that specific Taxes granted in such manner & under such Checks as rendered it easy to discover the least misapplications, when he knows that the monies collected on such Taxes have been in violation of every principle of policy &

Justice by the very men now in Office applied to such purposes~ — for my own part I can not believe that those who will hazard a misappropriation when detection is highly probable if not certain will hesitate doing it when they have the means in their own hands of hiding it from the public Eye, & surely those who have the disposal of an unknown sum may be said to have such means —

But I can not suspect the Generals Love of Liberty and attachment to his Country, I rather suppose that he has had not all that information which is necessary to form a right Judgment — his situation seemed favorable for acquiring a thorough knowledge of Our political Affairs, but I believe that the Junto, who always had their setters around him, took great pains to keep him ignorant of their measures and wholly in the dark as to their Views — sensible of his Virtues they concealed from him their Intentions, lest his influ-

ence, which has always been great, should be opposed to them.

Mr. F—r may talk of resigning but depend upon it he will not do it till he apprehends danger of being displaced or is thoroughly satisfied that he can no longer govern — I wish he would resign, it will not be an easy matter for him again to assume the Reins, there is a very wide difference between retaining an Office in possession and obtaining one that is vacant — a consciousness of that difference has emboldened many of the public Servants to follow their own inclination, and to treat even Congress with Contempt — secure of a Junto in Congress they were sure of their places, and having a few venial Ones at their Command, they have bid defiance to the Body — it is high time that your Servants were annually elected, from the highest to the lowest they have become insolent, let this reformation take place & I will answer for their behaving better in future —

Why will not your state Rhode Island, Jersey & No. Carolina give their Delegates similar Instructions to Cong^r^ if three or four States would agree & urge a reformation in the same points they would not fail of success — Copies of Our memorial &c should be sent to those states —

What think you of the Cincinnati, what says Congress to it, how does your state relish it^?^ is it an Exotic and a part of the great System or not^?^ a serious opposition is forming to it here & such as will soon check if not destroy the influence of the Institution in this State. . . .

The following letter, found among Stephen Higginson's papers, shows how he and his partner were tormented, thus early, by the question of slavery: —

New York Novr. 4th 1787–

Gentlemen, — On or about the 8th of September last my Negro Wench named Beth left me and stole and carried off with

her a Part of my Property — My Neighbor Mr. Daniel Ludlow who lately returned from Boston informs Me She is now in your City and has hired herself out (with her Husband a servant of Mr. Charles McEvers) to a Person in Hanover Street, near to a Mr. Coffin Jones upon my Application to Govr. Clinton he has favoured Me with a Letter to his Excellency Govr. Hancock requesting that She may be apprehended agreeable to the Articles of Confederation and sent back that She may be made amenable to the Laws of this State for her felonious Conduct. This Letter I have taken the Liberty by the Recommendation of my Friend Mr. Ludlow to send under Cover to You, and have to request that You would be so good as to deliver it to Govr. Hancock as soon as it comes to Hand, who I make no doubt will give every Aid in his Power to apprehend her — to assist in finding the Wench it is necessary to give you the fol-

lowing Description — She is remarkably short about 28 Years of Age a Yellowish Complexion her Front Teeth are bad She wears her Hair turned back over a Roll and was pregnant when She left Me — her Husband who is now with her is about 25 Years old slender made about 5 feet or 6 inches high black Complexion dresses his Hair back and one or two of his Fingers of one of his Hands is maimed and in some Measure useless — As She is an artful Wench to prevent her escaping I beg when She is apprehended that She may be confined until Capt. Barnard who commands the Schooner Boston Packet and who will leave this on Wednesday is ready to sail for New York and who has promised to take Charge of her — You will be pleased to Deliver her to him just before he sails, with her Cloaths and such Things as may be found with her, and whatever Expence and Trouble may attend this Business, I will chearfully pay to

your Order, and your Friendship in this will much oblige

Gentlemen Your most obt. and very humble Servt.

THO. SMITH.

Messrs. JACKSON and HIGGINSON, Boston.

I should personally take an extreme interest in knowing precisely what reply was made by the house of Jackson & Higginson to this confiding request; but those who recall the opinion of John Hancock, expressed by "Laco," may well doubt whether a coöperation between them in slave-hunting would have been altogether harmonious.

The following passage from a letter throws a curious light upon the land speculations of early days: —

Our Court have granted you 3000 Acres of Land in Our eastern Country & appointed a Committee to lay it out in York Cumberland or Lincoln Counties the two

first Committees that were appointed made no return & perhaps owing to the Influence you suspect of being against you, but the last Session a new Committee was appointed who will do the Business, they are good men & mean I am told to lay it out in the County of York where there is a plenty of good Land — Our Judge Sewall is Chairman of the Committee — I expect next week to see two of the Gentlemen when I shall not fail to urge them to perfect the Business & to your advantage — I should have wrote you before on this matter but I have not till within a few days been able to find the real state of it.

I am interested in a lot of Land in north Carolina, my share is 10,000 Acres, the quality of it is said to be very good & the value of it great, from two to three Dollars ℔ Acre — I have heard much of its value &c but I know nothing about it but from the Accounts of others — it is so very distant from hence that I never expect to

have such knowledge of it as is necessary to make any advantage of it either in the way of sale or improvement, but you by living in the neighborhood may perhaps find your account in exchanging what may be set off to you here for it, as the same difficulty will attend your holding wild Lands here — I would therefore propose to you an inquiry into the Value of my Lands in No. Carolina, in order that if We think it convenient We may thus exchange upon fair and equitable terms — Mr. Hawkins I suppose can give you full information about it, I could not describe it to him with precision from memory when I was in Congress, but he appeared to be well acquainted with that Country where it lays — my share is one eighth part of a Tract containing Eighty thousand Acres which is part of a Tract of Land q^{t} 100,000 Acres granted by the King to Governor Dobbs by eight patents of 12,500 Acres each, it is known by the

name of the *great Tract* & is situated on Rocky or Johnson River & the Branches thereof in Mecklenburg County, & is said to be of excellent quality & within seven miles of the Court house.

We purchased it of Mr. Alexander Rose of So. Carolina & have from him the original Patents with his own Deeds & the intermediate Ones, so that the Title is very clear and good — Mr. Rose has declared to us that he could have had for it since or before two hard Dollars ℔ Acre, & a Gentleman who came through the Country told us he knew the Land perfectly, that it was well situated & very good, & he was very urgent with us to be admitted to a share in the purchase, promising that he would go & see it settled &c. We had made Our Company & declined — Our Company are Jona. Jackson, John Lowell, Nath Tracy, Leo. Jarvis, T: Russell, Martin Brimmer, Jn° & Andrew Cabot and myself — I have since heard that the Land is

not so good as We had heard but it was from a Person who lived in that Country and wanted to purchase — Now I wish you to satisfy yourself as to the quality & value of it, which you may easily do with this description of it taking care to distinguish between those who wish to purchase it & those from whom you can get a disinterested Account of it — Mr. Hawkins I should suppose can put you in a way to get the information wanted — as it is much out of Our reach I believe some of the others would sell on good terms — The sire of your mare from the best information I can get was a horse imported by the late Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire called the *little Driver* a very famous horse in this Country — present my respects to all Friends.

I am yours affye

[Stephen Higginson.]

Honble Arthur Lee, Esqre
Member of Congress Annapolis

It is a curious fact that the signature of this letter is omitted; but it is in the handwriting of Mr. Higginson, and endorsed by Mr. Lee as having been received from him. The omission was doubtless accidental, although had it occurred later, after the Federalists had become objects of suspicion and possible indictment, a different interpretation might have been put upon it.

The gift of land by the State of Massachusetts to Arthur Lee was made, it will be remembered, in acknowledgment of his services to the colony as its agent in England in connection with Benjamin Franklin. The amount appropriated to him has been usually stated at four thousand acres, but is here fixed at three thousand. The reference to Southern lands is very interesting, as showing that the Boston merchants were already extending their interests very widely. I have been able to ascertain nothing further about "the great

tract," except that my kinsman, Colonel Henry Lee, once told me that he used to hear these lands mentioned in his youth; and that it was a tradition in the family that Jonathan Jackson, being urged to go and visit them, replied that he would do it if the other owners would send him in a coach-and-six. It is hardly worth while to follow up further any feature of that period which even Colonel Lee's memory cannot recall; but if I am among the legal heirs to a few hundred acres of North Carolina land "of excellent quality," I should certainly be very glad to know it. As to the close of this letter, there is something very amusing, and perhaps rather healthful and creditable, in the manner in which the writer's discourse, beginning with Alexander Hamilton and the five per cent impost, ends with horseflesh and the Little Driver.

The following letter is addressed to the Rev. John Pierce, then Stephen Hig-

ginson's pastor in the Brookline (Mass.) Congregational parish, and in later life a familiar object at the Commencement dinners at Harvard College, where he always led the singing. It will doubtless be regarded by his successors in the ministry as affording an admirable example for parishioners. The original letter is endorsed in the usual methodical manner of Dr. Pierce, "Stephen Higginson, Senior, Feb. 13, 1805 $100."

Boston, Feby 13, 1805.

D. Sir,—With concern we have heard of your illness; but with pleasure we this day learn by Mr. Heath that you are mending.

I inclose you 100 dollars in Bills, which [I] beg you to accept, persuaded that Gentlemen in your profession are not sufficiently compensated for their labours, nor furnished by their Hearers with competent means of support, especially in

cases of sickness and extra expense, I consider it a duty for me to contribute in this way.

I have only to request that you will not mention, nor feel yourself obligated by this mark of esteem and friendship — with my own and Mrs. Hs. respects for Mrs. P I remain Sir yours truly —

S: HIGGINSON.

Stephen Higginson's first wife died in 1788, and he married for his second wife, on May 15, 1789, Elizabeth Perkins, daughter of an English merchant residing in Boston, and of no known kinship to the well-known Boston family of that name. She had one child only, — James Perkins, born July, 1791, — who was the last of his generation, and to whom I am indebted for some later glimpses of my grandfather. This wife dying, he married, in September, 1792, as a third wife, her sister, the marriage

having this quaint announcement from the town clerk: —

Boston, ss.

A purpose of Marriage between
Hon^ble^ Stephen Higginson Esq & M^iss^
Sarah Perkins, of Boston

Has stood entered with me for the Space of *Fifteen* Days, and due *Publication* of such their Intention or Purpose has been made by asking their Banns at three several public Meetings within the said Town, as the Law directs.
Certified under my Hand the 24 Day of September — *Anno Domini*, 1792
WILLIAM COOPER *Town Clerk.*

In George Ticknor's interesting life of his own boyhood and early training, edited by Hillard, Ticknor says of himself, "At this period I very much frequented the families of Mr. Stephen Higginson, Mr.

S. G. Perkins, Mr. Richard Sullivan, Mr. William Sullivan, Dr. John C. Warren, Senior, and Mr. William Prescott."[1] During the War of 1812, while the Hartford Convention was going on, Ticknor had occasion to call on President John Adams, and gives this description of his return from the visit: —

I felt so uncomfortably, that I made my acknowledgments for his kindness in giving me the letters, and escaped as soon as I could.

A few days afterward (22d Dec., 1814) I set out on my journey, having the advantage of Mr. Samuel G. Perkins's company as far as Washington. He was one of the prominent merchants in Boston — a man of no small intellectual culture, and of a very generous and noble nature. He had been a great deal about the world, and understood its ways. His manners were

[1] Hillard's *Life of Ticknor*, i, 12.

frank, open-hearted, and decisive, and, to some persons, brusque. All men respected, many loved him.

Mrs. Perkins was the daughter of Mr. Stephen Higginson, Senior, — an important person at one time in the political affairs of the town of Boston, and the head of the commercial house of which Mr. Perkins was a member. Mrs. Perkins was at one time very beautiful. Talleyrand, when I was in Paris in 1818, spoke to me of her as the most beautiful young person he had ever known, he having seen her when in exile in this country. She was always striking in her person, and very brilliant in conversation. Her house was a most agreeable one, and I had become intimate and familiar there, dining with them generally every week.[1]

Stephen Higginson's name appears in the London "Court Guide" for 1800 as

[1] Hillard's *Life of Ticknor*, i, 13.

residing at 10 Gower Street. Later he spent from 1806 to 1812 in England with his third wife and was there again in 1818. While there he wrote back to his son Stephen (my father) remonstrating over the latter's dangerous course in sending out vessels, even while this was made most perilous by Orders in Council, on the one side, and by Berlin and Milan Decrees on the other. In this respect my father was influenced by the opinions of George Cabot, who believed at times that Napoleon's fall was near, my father meanwhile risking hundreds of thousands of dollars on that expectation, a misfortune which my grandfather had apparently escaped through greater caution.

XV

THE STRANGE CAREER OF A SON AND HEIR

"My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules."

— *Hamlet*, Act I, Sc. 2.

THE STRANGE CAREER OF A SON AND HEIR

A MYSTERY has always been attached to the whole career of Stephen Higginson's eldest son. Born at Salem on January 15, 1765, and bearing the traditional family name of John, he was appointed on March 4, 1791, a lieutenant of infantry under the new government, through the influence of General Knox, Secretary of War. He had previously served in 1787 as an ensign in Jackson's forces, and had since been a master mariner. His father had asked for a captain's commission for him and followed it up by this frank letter: —

BOSTON April 7" 1790.

SIR:

I received your obliging Letter by the last post, and thank you for your friendly intentions both as to me and my Son

John. I had no expectation, nor did I even wish, that the established rules of rank &c should be infringed to benefit John. All I aimed at was to secure to him that grade, which he would obtain by a personal application, in virtue of his former Commission. if a company could in that way fall to his lot, it would be very agreeable; but if not, he must be content with a lower grade. The same post that handed me yours, brought me also a letter from him, in which he requests me to apply for a Commission for him; having some how heard, that a new Corps was to be raised. All I wish is, that he may have as eligible a Station, as the rules in such cases will admit of.[1]

The next glimpse that we have of Lieut. John Higginson is to be found in the following extract from the conversation of the late James Elliot Cabot — Emerson's bio-

[1] American Historical Association *Report*, 1896, i, 780, 781.

grapher — with his mother, who was full of reminiscences as she grew older: —

"John Higginson married in Paris. Your father was his groomsman. When all were waiting, he did not appear; and your father went after him to his lodgings, and found him there with his feet on the mantel-piece. He had forgotten all about it. His friends got a shop for him, and he agreed to keep it, if it was small enough for him to reach everything without getting up. He used to tell the customers to help themselves." [1]

The story is that, after marrying this French lady in Paris, in 1796, he somehow amassed a large fortune and had two daughters, Jeanette, who died young, and Simplice, who became the Vicomtesse de Rouillé. He lived, so it is said, in much display in Paris, but died at Richmond, Va., at the house of Mr. Meyers, in 1818.

[1] *J. Elliot Cabot* (privately printed), p. 93.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON

It has been already mentioned that Stephen Higginson, under the influence of George Cabot, burned most of his private letters before his death. It is curious that among those preserved should be a letter from him to his French granddaughter, accompanied by a reply that came to him from her. The correspondence is too curious not to print, though his letter shows an asperity which rather suggests "Laco" and is quite unusual from him, while hers has a beguiling quality which might have come out of a French novel.

Brookline Oct^{r} 1st 1826

My Dear Grand Daughter

I have rec'd your affectionate Letter of the 8th of June last, & have considered its contents. While I thank you for the kind expressions of regard it contains, & particularly for the strong desire you express to come to America for the purpose of seeing me, I must say to you that my

great age & the infirmities consequent to it, forbid me to indulge the hope of seeing you in this life. You must regret this decision of mine the less, since the same reasons I have given for it, would operate, should I continue so long in life, to take from you the pleasure you might anticipate from a personal interview.

I will avail myself of this occasion to perform to you a painful duty, but necessary, as it will prevent a disappointment hereafter of any expectations you may have formed of deriving a benefit from what property I may leave at my decease. My pecuniary circumstances have so changed within a few years last past, that I shall barely be able to make a tolerable provision for those children who are about me, & who have been more unfortunate in money concerns than myself. I must distribute what I have amongst them, or they may suffer.

It is a relief to my mind on this subject,

that I had advanced to your late father in his life time, a much greater sum than would have fallen to his share, had he survived me — the whole of which was unpaid at his death, & is still due me. And the Justice of the actual disposition I shall make of my property, will be the more apparent to you, when when (*sic*) you consider the fact which must be known to your mother as well as it is to me — that she has heretofore received from her husband the whole of what he had acquired since he left France.

With my kind regards to your mother,
I am your affectionate Grandfather
STEPHEN HIGGINSON.[1]

It apparently took this granddaughter a year and a half to muster courage to answer him, and he died a few months after receiving her letter.

[1] From MSS.

lyon. june 6 1828

My dear grand father

I could not, without an afflicted and thankful sentiment, read your letter of the first october. by my reading it I understood that you loved me, that you was thinking of me always notwithstanding my living far from your eyes; and that you have a expressed a wish to see me nearer to you. that wish made me happy and it makes me happy yet now, because I keep alive the hope of going to america, and receiving from your hands the benediction, you fill my soul with sorrow, when you appear to renounce to the pleasure of seeing me in this world. wherefore, my dear father, do you permit that so sad a thought may invade your heart? your health is good indeed and your soul strong. you must, therefore appreciate the life for the happiness of the friends and parents living around you.

since I took the pleasure and honour of

writing to you, my dear father, I brought out a third little child. it had caused to me long pains, . . . and the poor child died three months after its birth. I was very afflicted by its death; but I receive great comfort from my three [*sic*] children alive.

I am very grateful to you, dear grand father, for your forgetting not your french grand daughter. she pursues her studies in the english language in order to enable herself of conversing with you when her meeting you will take place. in educating my sons carefully, I will teach them to communicate in english, with the family of their mother, and to love you as I do.

my husband joins his wishes to the mine for the duration and improvement of your health, and I am respectfully and friendly, dear grand father, your most devoted and

affectionate grand daughter

HIGGINSON V^TESSE DE ROUILLÉ

Now that I am officiating as biographer, I confess to some regret that this should be the last memorial in my possession in respect to the French member of the family. Either her sons all died or else some more absorbing interest prevented them from carrying out her promise, and I have tried in vain to obtain from the Almanach de Gotha any further traces of this branch of the family de Rouillé, or any records of the infusion of this American blood. The descent of the title seems to have been irregular and transferred; but the letters tell their own story, so far as they go. It is also curious that I can obtain through Virginia correspondents no further details as to the death of Captain John Higginson at Richmond, so that his whole later life is likely to remain an unsolved mystery.

XVI

LAST DAYS IN BROOKLINE

"Brightening to the last."
Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, line 909.

LAST DAYS IN BROOKLINE

So far as I can remember, I had but one glimpse of my grandfather, and that was when I was nearly five years old. After riding over to Brookline in a yellow and creaking chaise, where I sat between my father and mother, I can dimly recall what followed. It has always been my impression, that after we had driven through a gateway beneath shading trees, I saw on the right an aged man wearing small-clothes such as I had never seen my father wear, and walking with an old-fashioned cane which is still, if I mistake not, my property. This was my sole glimpse of Stephen Higginson. My cousin, Rev. William Henry Channing, who was a dozen years older than myself, wrote out, however, an ample description of our common grandfather as

seen in those later years, and this with such vividness as amply deserves preservation. It is as follows: —

Let me first of all describe my grandfather. He must at that period when he first rises on my memory have been between sixty and seventy years of age, and, owing doubtless to the fact that, following the universal fashion of gentlemen of his position in that period, he wore his gray hair powdered, he was to me the type of all that was most ancient and venerable. His imposing figure, air, and manner filled me with ever new admiration, as, clothed in entire black, with his snowy locks and queue, and his ruffled wristbands and shirt bosom, white cravat above, and tightly buttoned gaiters or buckled shoes below, with broad-brimmed hat and gold-headed cane, he descended the door-steps to enter his carriage. This carriage, one of the large, brightly ornamented, highly pol-

ished style then in vogue, with a lofty cushioned box seat for the coachman and platform behind for the footman, had been built in England, whence my grandfather had lately returned, and was, I presume, of very much the same pattern as thousands which are seen every day in all European and American cities. But it affected my imagination then as a princely equipage. So, as all boys are wont to fancy, my grandfather appeared to me the peer of the noblest. And still more stately and elegant was he to my imagination when attired in full costume to receive his guests at dinner or evening parties in his own house. Such was my grandfather when prepared to take his place in society. But the daily morning preparation for this grand display was an ever new mystery, which was watched with curious delight. He came down to the breakfast-room in a long white woolen wrapper belted around the middle, always greeting

us little folks with a benignant smile, and entertaining us during the meal by pleasant sallies, droll stories, and small talk, chatting between the whiles with his wife or my mother, as he sipped his chocolate or coffee and read his newspaper. And then came the chief mysteries of the toilet. His mirror, razors, hot water, napkins, etc., were brought in by his man-servant, and placed in full light; for my grandfather always chose to shave himself. The process was deliberate and solemn, for he was very precise and neat. And then came the time for my grandmother's skillful manipulations. The large japanned-box, with powder-puffs, brushes and combs, etc., was opened, a large clean napkin was spread over the shoulders of my grandfather, the ribbon of the queue was unrolled, shaken, and smoothed, the locks were carefully brushed out, the powder used on the previous day was carefully removed, the forehead was cleansed with a sponge, and

then the readjustment began. The hair carefully brushed back over the head and behind the ears, though not so tight as to be flat, but rather loosely, and then neatly bound into a queue. Then the powder-puff was profusely used; a half-moon of pure white was marked upon the summit of the forehead in front of the hair. Next the napkin round the shoulders was removed, and a fresh white cravat with long lapels was folded and skillfully tied around the neck. So much for the upper part of the person. Next came the serious work of making ready the nether limbs. These were the days of small-clothes and long hose, which varied in thickness according to the season. In the winter time or inclement weather, my grandfather wore woolen gaiters buttoning up to the knee, but in the summer or in fine weather he wore black silk stockings, or in very hot weather white. But it was a lengthened performance to tie

down the drawers; to pull up with perfect smoothness — leaving no possible wrinkles — the stockings; to garter them tightly above the knee; to arrange the breeches neatly over them and button them tight, and then to fasten on the gaiters or the buckled shoes, according to the weather. And then my grandsire proceeded up-stairs to complete his equipment, — to don his low-hung waistcoat and broad-skirted coat. Certainly, the style of those old days was very imposing in effect, but it involved a singular amount of time, trouble, and inconvenience, which in these more careless days is avoided. But dress then was still a fine art, and demanded considerate thought, as a chief duty of social etiquette.

But this lingering upon external details is doing my reverend ancestor great injustice if it leaves on the minds of any reader an impression that he was in the least de-

gree ostentatious or foppish. No one could be more utterly free from such folly. He simply felt that it was a part of self-respect, as of mutual respect, to be scrupulously neat, refined, and elegant. In truth, my grandfather was a singularly manly, energetic, sensible, well-balanced, sagacious man of business, prudent and practical, prompt and energetic, full of enterprise yet conscientious and cautious. Engaged in large transactions in copartnership with his sons, he had been singularly successful until the difficulties between Great Britain and France; the Berlin and Milan decrees, and the American Embargo, embarrassed his affairs as they did then gall New Englanders engaged in commerce. How he and his firm suffered, I, of course, was quite too young to form the least notion, and have never inquired since. Certainly, to all appearance he was living entirely at his ease and in prosperity, with his town and country house, horses and carriages,

and hospitable welcome for all constant visitors and guests. Though now, in his old age, intrusting the more active offices of the firm and their extensive correspondence to his partners and their clerks, so far as memory serves, my grandfather went regularly every day to his place of business and to the Exchange.

Early I became aware also that my grandfather had been and still was an active and influential politician, enlisted with intense earnestness of conviction and not a little passion and prejudice and determined will upon the Federal side. He had long been one of the so-called Essex Junto; had fervently supported Washington and been appointed by him as naval commissioner for Boston; was in close correspondence with Timothy Pickering; sat constantly in counsel with George Cabot, Josiah Quincy, Harrison Gray Otis, and their compeers; supported Fisher Ames, as the most trustworthy orator and expounder of their party;

stood firmly by Governor Strong, admired Hamilton and Jay, detested Jefferson and the Democrats, hated Bonaparte, dreaded French plots, confided implicitly in true republicanism, wished for cordial alliance with Great Britain; in a word, was a thorough-going, uncompromising, ardent, steadfast Federalist, and as such a zealous and devoted patriot in every fibre of his frame.

He was, moreover, a very powerful and effective writer in the public press, and under his well-known signature of "Laco" had dealt very heavy blows against the intriguing, half-hearted, double-tongued, and double-dealing political manœuverers of the time, in a series of articles which, for their vehement indignation and keen satire and vigor of style, have rarely been surpassed. His fireside, therefore, was a centre of earnest discussion of the great practical controversies of the day; and without in the least comprehending the full

import of their meaning, my boyish ears drank in and my boyish heart and imagination retained political impressions, which remained unaltered till the widening experiences of life, extended historical reading, and the changed aspect of the political world at home and abroad, gradually modified them. Well do I remember to this day the utter amazement with which, when a boy of some twelve years of age, I heard a gentleman who was visiting my mother hazard the to me extravagantly heretical suggestion, "A Democrat may be honest in his convictions." In my grandfather's day and home such a remark would have been deemed treason, and would have branded the person who made it as untrustworthy. On the whole, it was a healthful stimulation to a child's intellectual power of discernment, honorable feeling, and patriotic devotion to great practical principles inculcated by such men as my grandfather and George Cabot and Henry

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Lee, and the many men of mark whom he gathered round him as his guests; and as all my relatives on my father's side, as well as on my mother's, were zealous and uncompromising Federalists, my whole form of thought and feeling took from the first a highly conservative and aristocratic form.

These practical associations and convictions, which unconsciously framed the osseous and muscular system of my character were rounded out and completed by the social influences spread around me by my grandmother, — an English woman by birth and breeding, married to my grandfather in his widowhood, many years after the death of my mother's mother. A lover of the world and fashionable society and a stanch churchwoman, her visitors, too, gentlewomen of high-bred manners, elegant and stately appearance, she gave me a standard of courtesy which wide-extended observation and experience through

many lands has but slightly enlarged or enriched.

. . . . . .

There were occasionally two visitors of a different stamp, excellent ladies, who had seen better days and were now fallen under the cloud of misfortune, through whose softened eyes, subdued tones, and modest demeanor, breathed a pathetic minor key, like an æolian harp. And two most venerable dames, dressed always precisely like one another to a pin, in brown silk, with tightly fitting caps and starched neckerchiefs, the daughters of a very celebrated and eccentric doctor of divinity, with soft little voices and sweet smiles, used to affect my boyish fancy, as if two old-fashioned family portraits had suddenly started to conscious life, and had stepped down from their frames. My grandmother was of a most hospitable temper, and a scrupulously neat housekeeper. Her Christmas dinners for aunts, uncles, and cousins, some

twoscore in number, were festivals to be looked forward to and remembered for weeks. And every evening, tea, with buttered bread in thin rolls and crisp cocoanut cakes and gingerbread, was handed round by the man-servant and maid with great ceremony.

Previous to this, however, had been the grand sight for the children of building up the huge wood-fire in the generous chimney. My grandfather then had wakened from the long cosy nap which he took every afternoon in his comfortable arm-chair before the fire-place. The servant brought in the ample "leather" filled with logs of wood. The high polished brass andirons were drawn back, with a large iron shovel the live coals of the declining fire had been raked forward, and then amid the still warm ashes was deposited the huge backlog of hard wood; upon this was placed the back-stick; then the fore-stick, some light and easily kindling wood inserted

between them; upon these were piled the glowing embers, and over them, so laid as to leave interstices for the draught, were reared smaller logs and sticks, then the remainder of the red coals opened beneath the fore-sticks, and the work thus scientifically and artistically finished. The result was a glorious blaze that warmed with cheery ruddiness the walls and ceiling darkling in the twilight, and filled all hearts with the sense of good cheer, as the snowstorm was seen sweeping or the rain falling in the streets, ere the shutters were closed and the curtains drawn; and then came the magic hour for stories, as, gathering my sisters and myself on stools or small chairs around her, was opened for us the world of fairy romance. Later on came in uncles, aunts, neighbors, and visitors, to chat over the news, or discuss the politics of the day, or to join in games of whist, checkers, dominoes, ending with a snug supper at nine o'clock. Altogether, my impressions

of those times are of most cordial, cheerful friendliness and open-handed hospitality.[1]

[1] Frothingham, *Life of W. H. Channing*, pp. 9–15.

XVII

STEPHEN HIGGINSON AS DRAWN BY OTHERS

"Studied in his death."

— *Macbeth*, Act I, Sc. 4.

STEPHEN HIGGINSON AS DRAWN BY OTHERS

THE following summary of Stephen Higginson's public life was written by his lifelong friend as well as kinsman, John Lowell: —

Died in this city [November 22, 1828], at the advanced age of 85, the Hon. Stephen Higginson. Mr. Higginson was born at Salem, in the year 1743, and was the sole surviving male descendant of the past generation, of the Rev. Francis Higginson, one of the most eminent of the Pilgrim clergy. The late Mr. Higginson was bred to the mercantile pursuit, under the late Deacon Smith of this town, a man of eminent probity and worth. Having early incurred the expenses of a family, to support which his business was not competent, he betook

himself to the *Home* of the Salem Youth, the Ocean. From the year 1765 to the breaking out of the war, he was an active, bold and successful shipmaster. To this early training in hardship, and enterprise, his future character was indebted for many of its marked traits.

Upon his quitting the sea, he embarked ardently in the cause of the Revolution, and, young as he was, and unpractised as he had been, in affairs of State, his rare acuteness and sagacity, and his inflexible firmness soon pointed him out as a man fitted for times of peril and dismay. He was sent to the Revolutionary Congress in 1783, by the Legislature of this State, where he soon distinguished himself, and acquired the confidence and friendship of the most eminent men in every part of the Union. When the distressing effects of the war began to press heavily on the People of this State and they broke out into actual rebellion in 1780, Mr. Higginson was one

JOHN LOWELL

of the few men selected by Gov. Bowdoin as his advisers, in that dark and stormy period; and to that former gentleman's remarkable coolness and intrepidity, a very fair share of that bloodless victory of the Constitution over Anarchy may be ascribed. It can hardly be forgotten, that in all the measures which followed Washington's proclamation of Neutrality — in defeating Madison's war resolutions — in upholding John Jay, and George Washington in his efforts for preserving the peace of the Nation by the treaty of 1794, Mr. Higginson was a "Gap" man — ready to mount the breach, and to defend the Constitution against all assaults. It would be improbable that a man so inflexible in the pursuit of what is right, should not occasionally make enemies, yet it was his good fortune to enjoy, in succession, the confidence of John and Samuel Adams, of Elbridge Gerry, and of Washington, Lincoln, Strong, Brooks, Cabot, Parsons, and Ames.

He was a firm supporter of John Adams's administration; and in the quasi war against France, was by that administration made Navy Agent for Massachusetts, at that interesting and active moment, which office he held until removed by Jefferson. In short, there were not many individuals in our Nation, whose minds were more felt in the war of the Revolution, in the disturbances which succeeded it, in the creation of a new Government, and in the support of the feeble fabric in its infancy, than was that of Stephen Higginson. Would you inquire for his political opinions? Read Washington's Legacy, and the writings of Hamilton. There they are embodied — where *they* led, he was sure to follow. Very few merchants suffered more deeply than Mr. Higginson by the spoliations of all the belligerents, yet his personal sufferings never warped his judgment. He looked steadily to the peace and happiness of his country as his polar star. To the

ruinous and now exploded system of embargo and non-intercourse he was steadily opposed, but he was strenuous in favor of an efficient marine as the only honorable means of making our rights respected. As a merchant, Mr. Higginson set an honorable example of enterprise tempered by discretion. Though exposed to severe reverses, his mind always rose superior to them. As a citizen, he was always prompt and liberal in promoting every institution, whether literary or charitable. In domestic life he displayed the virtues which an understanding so sound, warmed by an affectionate heart could not fail to form and to cherish. The fair and unspotted fame, which he inherited from his ancestors, he took care to transmit unblemished to his numerous descendants, whose surest course to honorable distinction will be to imitate his correct and dignified example.[1]

[1] *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 23, 1828.

This was the judgment of a man who had been all his life in close contact with his kinsman and friend, Stephen Higginson; but we must turn to a woman's pen for the finer insight needed in summing up personal character. On December 7, 1828, my mother wrote to a near kinswoman, speaking of the death of her father-in-law: —

"*Of Him*, no sentiment but of love, admiration and reverence can be retained — He was the most remarkable combination of vigour and energy of mind, with all the elevated and generous affections and the delicate refined sentiments that I have ever known — his character and qualities should be forever cherished by his descendants and I hope I do not disparage them when I firmly believe that not one of them equals their venerable head. He continued to the last his sweet consideration for others and his gentle Patience — and left on the minds even of

his Nurses and attendants the strongest feeling and affection. Dear old Man, I love to think of him — and wish I could see in my children qualities that I could compare to his. I consider it an honor and privilege that they descend from so noble a stock and hope his illustrious example will be incentive to excellence in all of them."

With these words from my mother I may well close this memorial.

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